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**THE BEACON PRESS PUBLICATIONS
IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

**THE BEACON COURSE
OF GRADED LESSONS**

William I. Lawrance

Florence Buck

EDITORS.

FROM DESERT TO TEMPLE

FROM DESERT TO TEMPLE

BY

ELEANOR WOOD WHITMAN



PRINTED IN U. S. A.

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To
"JOHN AND BERTA"
typical child lovers of stories
now passing on
to the joy of reading books for themselves

EDITORS' PREFACE

The Old Testament lends itself in a marked degree to dramatic presentation. While there are no dramas in that body of literature, dramatic elements abound. It is significant that the earliest fragments embedded in the ancient texts are snatches of songs, that their highest utterances, including not only the Psalms and Job but the more notable sayings of the prophets, are poetical in form, and that their narrative, wherever it turns upon what passed between man and man, is set forth in the form of direct conversation.

This dramatic character of Hebrew literature and life has been utilized by Mrs. Whitman in her book, *From Desert to Temple*. She has visualized the Old Testament story as a drama, and has wisely appealed, by her treatment of the material, to the dramatic instinct so strongly marked in later childhood and early adolescence. The use of this book by pupils approximately twelve years old should make real to them these ancient "people of God," instruct and quicken their developing minds in religious history and expression, and serve as a valuable introduction to the Gospel story.

The plans for the Beacon Course in Religious Education have from the first included the publica-

tion of three books dealing solely with the Bible and intended for pupils twelve, thirteen and fourteen years of age. The second of these, Dr. Florence Buck's *The Story of Jesus*, was first completed and has now for several years taken a foremost place among church-school manuals. The third in the series, Miss Helen Nicolay's *Peter and Paul and Their Friends*, appeared later and has already gained favor as an introduction to the Apostolic period. Mrs. Whitman's book, *From Desert to Temple*, here offered, covers the Old Testament history and literature. Thus the group of manuals presenting the Bible as a whole to students during these highly important years has reached completion.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to Rev. Edwin Fairley, a member of the staff of the Department of Religious Education, for editorial assistance in the preparation of this book. In his reading of the manuscript he has made many valuable suggestions. Our thanks are also due to Professor Theophile J. Meek, of Bryn Mawr College, for his careful reading of the work and his assistance in bringing its teachings into accord with the most recent developments in this field of study.

THE EDITORS.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Every nation has a beginning and a long interesting time of growth just as every hero has. A nation is a group of people who have lived together and learned to love the same things. We can then tell the story of a nation just as we can tell the story of a hero.

The story of the Hebrews is important because, in the midst of difficulties, great ideas grew up among them which they have given to the world. Every great nation has given some gift to the world. Indeed, a nation might be called a people united around a central idea, and a great nation is one whose history is centered around a great idea. The Romans gave the world highly developed law; the Greeks, our loftiest standards of art. It was something quite different that the Hebrews gave—a high idea of God, the Father of all peoples.

But they did not start with this God-idea. We shall see it grow up among them through the work of many leaders. Then we shall see it carefully kept and heroically defended by others.

Today the whole world is indebted to the Hebrew people for their gift, the knowledge of one God, the Father of all.

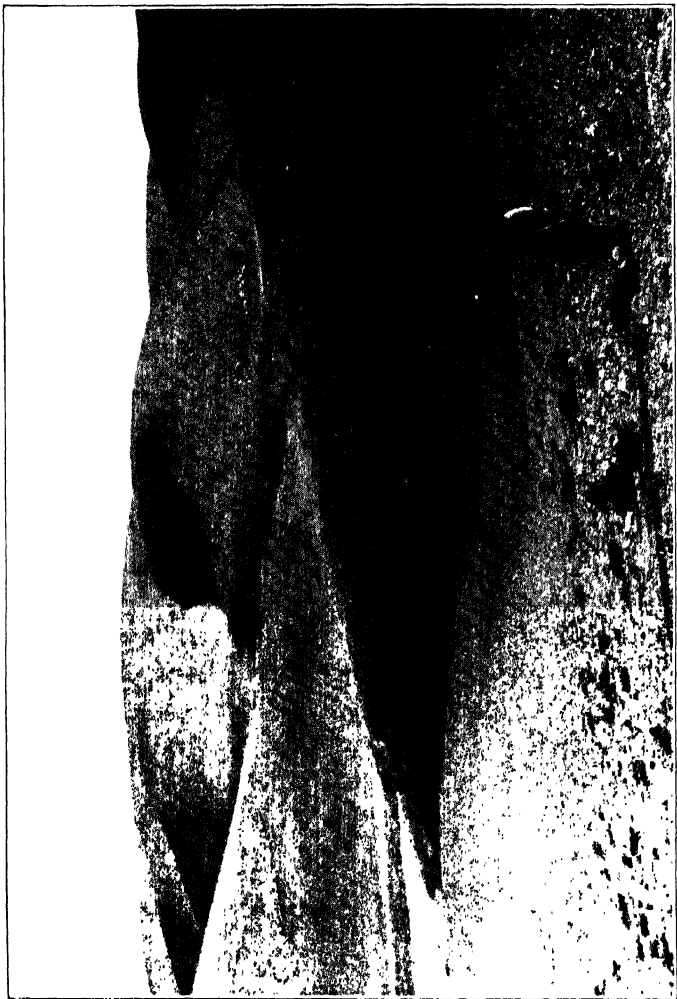
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A DESERT SCENE

CHAPTER I

CHILDHOOD AND JOY

Long ago the Hebrew people were wandering tribes in the desert. A tribe might be called the seed out of which a nation grows. It is a child-nation because in the tribe the people are learning to live, work, and play together as they must if they are to become a great nation.

The cradle of the Hebrew child-nation was probably the peninsula of Arabia.¹ Here were vast tracts of level sand broken by sharp ridges and rocky mountains. For miles and miles there was nothing growing in the sand but little dry shrubs, and the mountains were hard to climb and barren. How could a child-nation live in so desolate a place? Ah, there was one thing that relieved the still whiteness of the desert then as now—the oasis. Do you know what makes an oasis? It is the bubbling up of a living spring of water in the midst of the sand. The water gives life to trees and grass. The date palm was the tree that men most longed to see for it bore under its broad spreading leaves the delicious and nourishing dates. Little wonder is it that the early Hebrew tribes did not make their home in one settled place in the desert, but wandered from

¹ See map, noting how close Arabia is to Palestine.

oasis to oasis where the date palms grow. How beautiful against the horizon must have looked those stately palms when the caravans had been traveling for many days through the hot barren sand!

Is it surprising that they may have thought of the palm tree as a beautiful goddess? And the spring, too, seemed a gift of the goddess who graciously gave refreshing waters to men. We are fortunate in having in our Bible a song which some of these people sang long ages ago, to express their joy at the finding of a spring:

SONG OF THE WELL

Spring up, O well,
Sing ye unto it!
Well which the princes have dug,
Which the nobles of the people have delved
With their staves and with the scepter.
Out of the desert a gift!¹

See what a vivid picture this gives us of this early tribe. Across the desert comes the caravan. At the head are the camels, on the first one of which rides the sheik with his bright-colored turban. On the others are some of the older women and men carrying the great black rolls of the tents. The younger people are walking, driving the sheep and the goats. The burning sun has parched their tongues; their eyes are fixed on the green of the

¹ Num. 21: 17, 18. The last line of the song is another translation of the words. "From the wilderness to Mattanak" (gift).

palms, for they know that where palms grow there must be water.

At last the oasis is reached and the people fall with joy and prayer under the grateful shade of the trees. Soon the young men discover the spring and shout with joy. But the desert sand storms have choked it with sand, which must be dug out before the people can drink. But no one must rashly disturb the sacred water, for is it not the gift of the god of the oasis?

Solemnly all gather round the spring; out steps the sheik and waves his scepter, saying:

Spring up, O well!

Turning to the people he cries,

Sing ye unto it!

With dry throats they shout the words of the sheik,

Spring up, O well!

Then the sheik puts in his staff, after which the young princes of the tribe come forward with their staves and eagerly dig out the sand. Ah, there comes the clear water bubbling through! As they kneel reverently looking into the spring, the disturbed sand settles and there is clear beautiful water for all. Eagerly they drink and then, rising, look around at their new home.

The tents are taken down from the camels' backs and set up. Soon a little black tent city stands around the palm trees. After a night of rejoicing

and rest, work begins in the new home. The men and boys go out to find the best grass for the sheep and goats, and to explore the oasis, looking for wild animals and roots and fruits for food. The women and girls unpack their wool and twist it into yarn with their hands, ready to weave into blankets and cloaks with their little hand looms. If any clay can be found near the spring, they also mould pottery dishes to hold their goat's milk and cheese. So gay and happy are the girls as they work at their pottery that often they decorate it with bright colors which they get from the juices of plants.

One reason why they thus go to work at once is that they must prepare for the tribal feast of thanksgiving. Their own god has led them across the desert, but now they have come into the land of a new god, the Baal (lord) of the oasis. There are also the goddess of the palm tree and spring and other gods of wind and tree and rock to be thanked.

During the day the men look over the flocks and pick out a sheep to be sacrificed, and at night all gather around a camp fire. With eagerness they watch while the sheik kills the sheep and pours out its blood on the sand or on a stone for the Baal of the oasis. Then come songs of praise to the god or El of the tribe, because he has led them to such a friendly land and to the goddess of the spring for her gift of water. Finally, the roasted sheep is brought forth from the fire and all eat and drink, joyously feeling themselves to be brothers and akin to the gods who have befriended them.

There were many feasts kept by these early people. Our Sabbath day probably comes from one of these ancient feasts. Is it not wonderful to think that one day of rest in the week for almost the whole world began thousands of years ago in the desert?

Probably the Sabbath came from a feast sacred to a moon god. As the people sat in front of their tents, they saw the thin crescent of the new moon appear, and night after night as they looked up into the starry dome, they saw the moon grow to a fulness so bright that it dimmed the camp fires in front of their little tent city. The moon seemed like one of their companions. They could not help seeing that there were four stages in the coming and going of the moon god. The circle grew to half and then to full moon, then to half again and slowly disappeared.

Why did the beautiful glowing ball grow so slowly to brightness? Perhaps the demons of the desert, the jinn, were trying to put her to death. The jinn wanted darkness for their bad deeds. People were glad when the moon seemed to be overcoming the jinn and said, "Let us have a feast and rejoice." Thus they came to have four feasts a month to celebrate the moon goddess. Even at the last one, when the moon seemed to be going out into darkness, they were not sad because they hoped that the moon would always come back again and the darkness would not overcome her. For many years "new-moons" were celebrated in Israel (*Isa.* 1:14) and

the Sabbath grew to be a fixed law. (*Ex.* 20:8; 34: 21)

Another feast which the ancient Hebrew tribes kept in the desert was the spring festival.¹ When the lambs were born in the springtime there was rejoicing for they were new members of the tribe and the grass grew green around the spring and flowers appeared in their honor. Almost all people in the world from the earliest times until now have kept a spring festival. At these feasts there was singing and dancing and the young men and girls expressed their love for each other before the whole tribe.

A harvest festival, too, probably goes back to these desert days though they did not often sow the seeds themselves. They gathered wild grain and fruits such as the figs, olives, dates, bananas. All these seemed to be gifts hung on the trees for them by gods and goddesses. They felt that they must not take them without thanks.

All this shows how much the people thought about gods in those days. Everything that moved showed the power of a god. If a stone tumbled down a mountain, it was a god traveling across the earth; if the wind howled, it was a god speaking, or one of the jinn. They were afraid of some of these gods, but they felt friendly to most of them. The oldest name we know for the God of the Hebrews is

¹ *Deut.* 16, verses 1 and 5 show that the people had kept a spring feast at home for many years. This came later to be called the Passover feast.

El, which simply means god. Sometimes they called him Elohim, which is the plural of El, because they thought him more powerful than any one god. An old name for the Hebrew nation is Isra-el which means "the god who strives" for his people.

Besides all these gods, these early people worshipped the spirits of their ancestors. When the loved sheik of the tribe died, they saw him struggle with his breath and said, "His breath, his spirit, has gone away, but he will stay near us." They also dreamed about their dead and so these people felt that in the world there were two things, body and breath, or as we should say, matter and spirit.

Now we can see how this early tribal life was, indeed, the seed out of which the Hebrew nation grew. The Hebrews are the people that have given to the world the idea of one God, Father of all peoples. They did not start with this idea, for in the earliest times they thought that there were many gods around them, and that one of these was especially interested in them. This was the seed out of which the larger, truer idea of God grew.

In the rest of the story of this nation, we shall watch this seed grow. It will have a hard struggle to break through the shell of ignorance and cruelty in which it was wrapt in the desert, but we shall see new leaves break through and finally the full grown plant,—a nation with an idea of God the Father so beautiful that all the world desires it. "Out of a people, a gift."

THE FINDING OF THE SPRING

A Dramatic Scene

CHARACTERS: SHEIK OF THE TRIBE

SHEIK'S WIFE, SON, AND DAUGHTER

PEOPLE OF THE CARAVAN

SCENE: *An oasis in the Arabian desert. Everywhere white sand relieved by sparse bits of green and a group of palms at one side.*

The effect of a desert may be obtained by putting unbleached muslin over the floor and sprinkling some sand on it. Greenhouse palms may be used but the palm stalk may be painted on pasteboard and the leaves made of green paper. The spring should be a pan of water carefully concealed at one spot with sand enough around to be thrown out with sticks.

Costumes may be made with little expense from various colored cotton materials. Suggestions for color and form of costumes may be found in the Tissot or other pictures.

SHEIK'S SON: *(running ahead of the caravan, staggers across to the palm trees)* Water! Water! *(He bows in oriental attitude of prayer, occasionally lifting his arms toward the trees.)*

SHEIK: *(from distance)* O Ishtar, we are parched with thirst.

PEOPLE OF THE CARAVAN: O Ishtar, water!

SHEIK'S WIFE: *(appears supported by daughter as she feebly stretches out her hands toward palms)* Water, water, I perish for water. *(Sinks from exhaustion.)*

SHEIK'S DAUGHTER: *(prays)* O Ishtar, spirit of the palm, give of thy living water, lest my mother perish.

SHEIK: *(entering, looks at palm and then shouts back to*



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AN OASIS

caravan). Leave your camels there. Here is hope.

VOICES OF THE CARAVAN: (*near at hand*) Water! Water!

(*SHEIK takes attitude of prayer while members of the caravan enter showing signs of exhaustion from thirst.*)

SHEIK: (*prays*) O Ishtar, thou Queen of the Desert, give of thy liquid life to revive my sons and daughters. Ever will they praise thee.

(*PEOPLE OF THE CARAVAN respond by taking the attitude of prayer, the men bowed to earth and the women standing with hands outstretched toward trees.*)

SON OF SHEIK: Show me, O glorious one, the source of thy beauty, that it may bring life to the people. (*Rises and carefully examines green places in the sand. At one he takes courage and begins to dig, with hope in his face, while all eagerly watch him. Hope changes to despair as no water is found.*) Here are signs of water, yet the goddess hides it far beneath the sand. (*People of caravan show signs of despair.*)

DAUGHTER OF SHEIK: O beautiful palm, wilt thou let us die?

SHEIK'S WIFE: (*almost dying*) My throat is hot; this is the taste of death.

(*SHEIK picks up robe upon which he has been praying and rushes to wife's side.*)

SON OF SHEIK: (*seeing green spot where father's robe has been*) What is this? (*Looks, listens, digs into sand.*) Yea, here is water; the Queen of the Desert presents her gift; come.

SHEIK: (*comes quickly with scepter and waves it over the spring*) Spring up, O well; spring up, O well. (*To the people*) Sing ye unto it.

PEOPLE OF CARAVAN: Spring up, O well; spring up, O well.

SHEIK: Come forward, ye princes, and dig out the sand. Come ye nobles of the people and delve with your staves. (*Throws out sand with scepter. Others work with staves, while all watch breathlessly.*) Ah, at last water, life-giving water. (*Dips his hand into the spring and holds it up dripping.*) Out of the desert a gift. Come, drink.

(DAUGHTER takes queer piece of pottery out of sack, scoops up water and takes it to her mother.)

(*Funny old shepherd, famished, throws himself in front of others and puts head into spring. He is pulled out, struggling, while others dip up water and give to older men and women. At last all have secured a taste of water and show signs of relief and joy.*)

DAUGHTER OF SHEIK: (*as she sees her mother revive, skips forth joyously*)

Now returns joyous life,
Gladness comes once more;
O Desert Queen, accept our thanks
For the glorious gift of life.

PEOPLE OF THE CARAVAN: (*extending hands toward palm*)
Thanks to thee for life.

SHEIK: (*looking up toward sky*)

And to thee, O mighty El,

For guiding thy tribe

To the land of the beauteous palm.

(*To the people*)

Sing, sing to the praise of the spring
Whence issues life for all.

PEOPLE OF THE CARAVAN: Life and joy for all. (*To son*)
Sing us the song of the well.

SON OF SHEIK:

Spring up, O well,
Sing ye unto it,
Well which the princes have dug,
Which the nobles of the people have delved
With their staves and with the scepter,—
Out of the desert, a gift.

SHEIK: The camels, shall they not also have water?
(*Several men run off for camels.*) Bring now your tents
and your tools and make us a home in the desert. (*All
run off to bring their belongings.*)

SHEIK: (*left alone, lifts his hands in prayer*)

All ye gods of earth and air,
To you be thanks and praise.

CHAPTER II

WANDERING AND SORROW

Life was not always so beautiful for the early tribes which afterwards made the Hebrew nation as it was when they were settled peacefully around the spring of an oasis.

One day, let us suppose, the noise of another thirsty tribe was heard approaching. Hastily the men were called to be ready to meet them. In fierce tones and a strange dialect the newcomers demanded the spring. Water to refresh themselves they might have, replied the sheik of the Hebrews, but not the spring itself. Then came battle, the newcomers shouting that the spring was theirs because they had been there before. With sticks and stones and arrow heads they fought in deadly conflict. Then it was that Lamech, one of these early people, brought forth a new and deadly instrument—the sword.

With this sharp metal he struck dead at a blow a man who had wounded him. Slashing on with this terrible knife, he soon brought victory to the Hebrews, and the newcomers begged for mercy, promising to move on the next day if only water were given them. Then the Hebrews, as eager in hospitality as in war, called for their women to bring

water and food. One law in the mind of all desert peoples has always been this: we are bound to be true to anyone whom we have fed. The newcomers could, therefore, be fed and treated as friends till morning.

Lamech became the hero of the hour and sang a song of victory to his two wives. This song is one of the oldest passages that we have in our Bible:

THE SONG OF THE SWORD

Adah and Zillah, hear my voice,
Ye wives of Lamech, listen to my speech;
For I have slain a man for wounding me,
A young man for hurting me.
If Cain was avenged seven times,
Lamech shall be avenged seventy times seven.
(*Gen. 4: 23, 24*)

A savage old song this is with its desire for seven-fold revenge. But the desert people had no written laws to set things right and felt that they must threaten terrible punishment upon all who dared do wrong. They fought and believed that El, their god, gave them victory.

Now the love of travel and the desire for more possessions began again to move these people. The dates from the palms had all been gathered, the wild grain of the oasis had all been harvested. Why stay longer around the spring, when there were stores enough to take them on a long journey? Why not travel to that far away land by the two great

rivers, where wonderful things could be bought in the bazaars?

With eagerness camels were loaded with stores of grain and fruit, and the tribes set forth, driving their sheep and goats before them. North and east they took their way and came, after many days, to the city of Ur of the Chaldees, sacred to the moon-god. The city offered many good things in exchange for their wool and sheep, but it could not bind these true desert people, for above all else they loved freedom. They would rather be free than have fine things. So again they journeyed northward to the land of Aram, in which was the city of Haran.

This is the way the Bible tells the story, using the name "Abram," because this means Father of the People, and stands for the tribe:

And Terah took Abraham his son . . . and they went forth . . . from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan: And they came unto Haran and dwelt there. (*Gen.* 11:31)

Haran belonged to the kingdom of Babylonia. Here ruled a great king Hammurabi, whose picture has come down to us on the great stele on which his laws were cut. He was one of the earliest law-makers we know. The Hebrew tribes must have known of Hammurabi, but they did not want to live under his laws. For many years, however, they wandered about on the edges of his kingdom, adding many new people to their tribe.

We have two ways of finding out about people in that long ago time: first, from the writings of the Babylonian people who lived between the two great rivers and, second, from the later writings of the Hebrews themselves. Do you know how the people of the two rivers wrote? On clay tablets which they baked in the sun. They took the clay of their land and moulded it in their hands, as children make mud pies. While it was soft they wrote on it with a pointed stick or piece of metal and put it out in the sun to dry.

Many of these clay tablets have been dug up out of the sand. Thousands of them had been laid on shelves in buildings just as we put books in libraries. Scholars in Europe and America are today deciphering these tablets which are much older than the writings of the Hebrews.

Several of these clay tablets written just before the end of the reign of king Hammurabi use the name of Jacob-el which seems to imply that the Hebrew tribes lived there at one time, where they may have added to their number the Jacob tribe.

About two hundred years later in the same region, we find also the name of Abraham on a clay tablet. This tells us that one Abraham hired an ox and leased a farm and had a record made that he had paid his rent. This is not the Abraham of the Bible, but the use of the name shows that it was not uncommon in that country. The name Abraham may mean Father of his People, and may have been

here given to the sheik of one of the Hebrew tribes. Or perhaps the Abraham tribe here joined the Hebrews. You see the Hebrews are gathering more and more people as they go. Like a snowball, they are rolling up people who will afterwards make a nation.

More than anything else, all these people loved travel. Stories had come to them of the beautiful land of Canaan over by the Great Sea, as the Mediterranean Sea used to be called. To this far away land the Hebrews set out, now composed of several tribes with the Abraham tribe leading. That they are the same kind of people that we have come to know in the desert is shown by the fact that they still worshipped trees and springs and stones.

The Hebrew writings in the Bible tell us that Abraham "moved his tent, and came and dwelt by the oak of Mamre," (*Gen. 13: 18*) that is, oak of divination. Divination means the attempt to find out the will of a divinity or god. Outside of the desert it is the oak tree instead of the palm tree that is considered sacred. From the leaves of the oak, people tried to "divine" the will of the divinity. Abraham went there probably to ask the god of the oak tree for water and food, although he expected his own god to guide him on his journeys.

Abraham visited also a well called the Well of the Seven, or Beersheba. Probably he led the tribes in singing the song of the well before using the sacred water. The old story says that he planted a tree in Beersheba and called there on the name of

Yahweh. (*Gen.* 21: 33) Early desert tribes also regarded stones as the abiding places of gods, and we have a story coming from the Jacob tribes which illustrates this. Jacob, it is said, came to Beth-el (House of El) and passed the night there because the sun had set.

“And he took one of the stones which were there, and put it under his head, and lay down in that place to sleep. Then he dreamed and saw a ladder set up on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and, behold, the messengers of El were ascending and descending on it. And he was filled with awe and said, How awful is this place: this is none other than the house of El, and this is the gate of heaven. So Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head, and set it up for a pillar and poured oil upon the top of it. And Jacob made a vow saying, if El be with me and take care of me in this journey which I am making, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, and I return safe and sound to my father’s house, then shall El be my God and this stone which I have set up for a pillar, shall be a house of El. (*Gen.* 28: 11-22.)

This story, written long afterwards by the Hebrews, shows that they did not forget the early days when the gods of the stones and trees and springs were gracious to them in Canaan. Indeed, Beth-el was for many centuries a special place of worship. Not only does the Bible give accounts of these early times, but we have writings of the Egyptians also which tell us about the Hebrews in Canaan. The

Egyptians wrote in pictures on their tombs and temples. One of these picture-writings tells about a king of Egypt who went up into Canaan and conquered many cities. One of these he called Jacob-ra. Now Ra in Egyptian corresponds to El. So you see this is another account of the same Jacob tribe in Canaan. Another city he called Joseph-ra and the Hebrew writings tell us later of Joseph tribes.

Now Canaan was "a land beautiful and broad, a land flowing with milk and honey." (*Exodus* 3:8)

"It was a land of wheat and barley and vines and fig trees and pomegranates; a land of oil-olives and honey." (*Deut.* 8:8) This is the way the Hebrews described it and it is interesting to compare it with an ancient Egyptian writing called:

THE TALE OF SINUHE

It was a goodly land—
There were figs in it and vines,
More plentiful than water was its wine,
Copious was its honey, plenteous its oil;
All fruits were upon its trees.
Barley was there and spelt,
Without end all cattle.¹

But all this prosperity in Canaan was suddenly ended by a famine. Palestine has the desert to the west and to the south and sometimes the burning hot

¹ Barton, *Archeology and the Bible*, p. 307.

winds come up and kill everything. This or their migratory instinct it was, perhaps, that caused a great famine, and some of the Abraham and Jacob and Joseph tribes moved down to Egypt to buy corn. But this journey had a tragic ending. The Pharaoh of Egypt, Rameses the Great, decided to make them work for him. All over Egypt today are colossal statues of this king, and immense buildings remaining from the time when he made slaves build them. He needed bricks, and he forced the Hebrews to make them for him.

If you were to visit Egypt today, you would see people making bricks just as they used to do. They mixed mud with straw and cut it into little cakes and let the sun bake it. The straw is to hold the mud together. If you do not have straw, the brick may crumble and all your work be lost. Now the Egyptians forced the Hebrews to make bricks without giving them the straw, and they beat them if they could not get as many as they wanted.

A city named Pithom has been dug out of the sand, showing houses built of two kinds of brick, those with straw and those without. Probably this is one of the very cities that the enslaved Hebrews had to build, for the Hebrew writings tell us that they built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Rameses. (*Ex.* 1:11). A cartouche or monogram of King Rameses in Pithom shows that he was its builder.

The mummy of old Rameses has also been found, as well as that of his successor, Merneptah, who fought some Israelites up in Palestine at the

same time that he imprisoned others of them in Egypt. If you were to visit the Museum at Cairo you could look upon the dried and wrinkled faces of the Pharaoh of the "oppression" and the Pharaoh of the "exodus." These very men made slaves of the children of Israel.

How these freedom-loving wanderers did hate to work as slaves! Also, they wanted to rejoin their brethren in Canaan. Yet they did not know how to free themselves, and every day that they worked as slaves they became weaker and more despairing. It was Moses who arose and encouraged them and led them forth. You know the story of Moses, how he heard the voice of Yahweh out of a bush on a mountain telling him to go and lead the Hebrews out of Egypt. A splendid leader he must have been, for he led them forth in spite of the opposition of Merneptah.

It was when Moses had led them to the sacred mountain that the important thing happened which made the Hebrews begin to grow into a great nation—it was the making of a covenant with the God, Yahweh. Think of these people once more in the desert, camped round a majestic mountain. As the thunder rolls and the lightning flashes, they feel both fear and gratitude to the God, Yahweh. They are ready to make a sacred covenant with the Kenites, one of whose daughters Moses has married, and with the God, Yahweh. This covenant was made by a feast, such as we have seen they often have in the wilderness. Jethro, the Kenite, was

the host at the feast because he was a priest of Yahweh. When they had eaten, Jethro said,

Blessed be Yahweh

Who hath delivered them from the power of Pharaoh;

Who hath delivered the people from under the power of the Egyptians.

Now I am persuaded that Yahweh is greater than all other gods.

(*Ex.* 18:10-11)

The Hebrews do not at this time forget the God whom they had called El; they keep their old name Israel, but now they say, "Yahweh saved Israel that day out of the power of the Egyptians." (*Ex.* 14:30).

Now that the Hebrews were free again and had secured the promise of Yahweh as their powerful helper, was not everything possible? Their thoughts turned back to Canaan with high hopes. Strengthened by faith in their covenant with Yahweh, the people of Israel determined to use their freedom to gain a home and a country. Never in all their history did Israel forget the kindness of their God in leading them forth to liberty. They looked back upon it as a marvelous story. One of their later prophets expresses the love of God for the nation thus:

When Israel was a child

Then I loved him

And called my son out of Egypt.

(*Hos.* 11:1)

CHAPTER III

SEEKING A NEW HOME

Leaving the mountain which had now become to them a Holy Mountain, the Hebrews once more found themselves in the wilderness. They wandered freely, seeking water and food as of yore, with Moses now as their sheik.

No longer did they wander aimlessly, for during all the days of slavery in Egypt they had remembered that land flowing milk and honey where plenty could be had with freedom. In Egypt they had enjoyed some of the luxuries of that rich land, but the bondage had spoiled the pleasure. That some of their brethren were still in Canaan, also, is shown by the stele or tablet of Merneptah who says that he "desolated" Israel there.¹ If only they could find the Land of Canaan again, and their brethren, it would be better than the fruits of Egypt or the manna of the wilderness!

Moving north they came to the land of the Edomites, a wild tribe whose hand was "against every man and every man's hand against him."

¹ On this tablet are these lines—

Israel is desolated, his seed is not;

Palestine has become a widow for Egypt.

See Barton's *Archeology and the Bible*, p. 311.

Just east of the end of the Dead Sea they came upon the Moabites, who lived in great holes in the rocks. Some magnificent rock-cut houses can be seen there today. The Hebrews helped these people fight some of their battles and learned much from them about tilling the soil.

Passing still farther northward they overcame the Amorites, and some of the tribes of the Hebrews found land that they decided to hold and learn to cultivate. But most of the tribes had their eyes on the land beyond Jordan.

Finally the time came of which they had long dreamed, perhaps ever since they had camped in Canaan before going to Egypt, when they determined to go over to make Canaan their home. Home was the new idea that had come to the Hebrews. In the desert they had never desired a home, but now the world looked different to them; they wanted to possess Canaan and plant the grain and gather the grapes and live in houses.

Down from the heights to the east of the Jordan they poured, crossing the swift flowing river. The first city they attacked and took was Jericho, the "City of Palms," a beautiful walled city in the valley with plenty of running water and magnificent palms. So overjoyed were the Hebrews to gain the beautiful city that afterwards they told stories about taking it by marching around it and seeing the walls fall down as they blew their trumpets. This does not seem so long ago because we can see the foundations of this city today with its ancient walls.

At Jericho travelers can look upon layers of cities and can tell when the Hebrews came and went by the kind of brick and stone work they did.

From Jericho the different Hebrew tribes spread out like a fan, going up over the steep hills of the west slope of the valley to take different cities. How frightened the people were over the coming of the hordes from the desert we know from some ancient letters. These were found in Egypt at a little village called Tel El Amarna. Here is part of a letter from the king of Jerusalem, Ebed-Hepa, to his Egyptian lord, asking him to send mercenary soldiers at once to help against the Habiri who are taking all the land. These Habiri may have been the Hebrews, or a similar tribe.

To the king, my lord, speak, saying, Ebed-Hepa, thy servant—at the feet of my lord, the king, seven times and seven times I prostrate myself. —Thou dost not hearken to me!— May the king turn his face toward mercenaries. There are no lands left to the king, my lord. The Habiri plunder all the countries of the king. If there are mercenaries in this year then there will be left countries of the king, my lord. If there be no mercenaries, the countries of the king will be lost. Unto the scribe of the king, my lord, saying: Ebed-Hepa, thy servant. Take beautiful words to the king, my lord. Lost are the lands of the king, my lord.¹

What became of this unhappy king, we do not

¹ *Archeology and the Bible*, G. A. Barton, p. 346.

know, but probably the Habiri sacked his city, and probably he was shown no more mercy than we read that the Hebrews showed to a king of Jerusalem: for they chased him from place to place and finally they

caught him, and cut off his thumbs and his great toes. And Adonizedek said, Seventy kings with their thumbs and their great toes cut off, pick up crumbs under my table; as I have done, so God hath requited me! And they brought him to Jerusalem and he died there. (*Judges 1:6, 7*)

You see these stories show us that we are still studying about the days when there were no laws. The old custom of revenge they did know. They thought it right to cut off the toes and thumbs of the king of Jerusalem, just as he had cut off other kings' toes. But they did not always live up even to this standard of justice. Strange to say, they often thought that their god Yahweh helped them to do unfair, deceptive things as the following story shows.

Story of the Victory of Ehud

While the Hebrews were gradually getting settled in their new land, it seems that the Moabites came over and took Jericho and tried to collect tribute from all Israel. Then there rose up to fight them, Ehud, a left-handed man. He made a present to the king of Moab and told him that he wished to speak with him alone because he had a message

from God for him. Then he stuck a dagger through the king's body and left him to die alone. This mean and terrible deed he thought Yahweh liked, for he went out and said, "Follow after me! for Yahweh hath delivered your enemies, the Moabites, into your hand." (The story is recorded in *Judges* 3:12-30)

In an old part of the book of *Judges*, we have the strange story of a young man who stole money from his mother and gave it back when he heard the awful curse she pronounced upon the thief. As you read the story, notice how natural it is for them to plan to make an image for worship. They did not yet know of the commandment, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image." Notice, too, that Yahweh is the one god they think about as their own god.

Story of Micah of Ephraim

Now there was a man of the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Micah. And he said to his mother, The eleven hundred shekels of silver which were taken from you, about which you took an oath, saying it aloud in my hearing, behold, the silver is with me; it was I who took it. Now therefore I restore it to you.

And his mother said, Blessed of Yahweh is my son. Then he restored the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother and his mother said, I solemnly consecrate the silver to Yahweh from my hand through my son, to make a carved and a molten image.

So, when he restored the money to his mother, his mother took two hundred shekels of silver, and gave them

to the founder, who made with it a carved and molten image; and it was in the house of Micah. And the man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and household gods, and installed one of his sons who became his priest. (*Judges* 17:1-5)

This story makes us wish to ask many questions. What kind of image did the man make in his foundry? In what shape did he mould Yahweh? How could the image be both molten and carved? Was it, perhaps, in shape like a man with the body of molten metal and the head and hands of carved wood? Or was it in shape like a calf such as Israel worshiped later?¹ Nobody can answer these questions because later people were not allowed to make images of Yahweh and everybody forgot how they used to be made. The household gods (the Hebrew name is Teraphim) were probably little images like the big one. We do not know what shape the ephod was that Micah had in his little shrine, but it was something, possibly a linen apron, that he used when he made a request of Yahweh. You see this story was told long, long ago when people did not know that God could not be pictured by an image, and need not be given a house in which he should be visited if one could not go to his mountain.

Story of Stealing the Image of Yahweh

Now a strange thing happened to this image of Yahweh. It was stolen and taken on a long journey. It happened through a young man that Micah took

¹ (*I Kings* 12: 28, 29.)

into the family. This young man was from the village of Bethlehem, of the tribe of Judah, and he was a "Levite." This word seems to mean that he knew how to act as a priest to Yahweh in his shrine. When someone wished to inquire of Yahweh, the young man could take the ephod and ask the question and get the answer. It was supposed that Levites could do this better than other people. Micah, therefore, thought it would be a good thing to make the Levite priest in place of his son if he could hire him. Micah therefore said to him,

Stay with me, and be a father and a priest to me, and I will give you ten shekels of silver by the year, and a suit of clothes, and your living.

So the Levite entered into an agreement to dwell with the man; and the young man was to him as one of his sons. Then said Micah, Now I know that Yahweh will prosper me, since I have a Levite as my priest. (*Judges 17:10-13*)

It was this young Levite who caused Micah to lose his sacred image. It happened in the following way. Down in the south of the country, there lived the tribe of Dan. They sent out five "valiant men" to the north "to explore the land" for a home.

And when they were near the house of Micah, they recognized the voice of the young man, the Levite; so they turned aside there and said to him, Who brought you here? and What are you doing in this place? and What have you here?

And he said to them, Thus and so Micah has done to me

and he has hired me and I have become his priest. And they said to him, Inquire of God, will you, that we may know whether or not our undertaking shall be successful. Then they waited while the Levite went into the shrine and took the ephod and consulted Yahweh. When he came out he said to them, Go in peace: your undertaking is under the care of Yahweh.

They did not make an offer to the Levite then, but they probably saw that he was the kind of priest who could be bought. They may have made their plans at once to come back later and steal that image and induce the priest to leave Micah.

The five men went on north to decide where they wanted to make their new home and when they came back to their kinsmen in the south they were asked, "What is your report?" And they said,

Arise, let us go up against them; we have seen the land, and, behold, it is very good, and you are sitting idle. Do not delay to go and to enter in to take possession of the land. When you go, you will come to a people who suspect no danger, a place where there is no want of anything that is on the earth.¹

Joyfully the people of Dan packed up their things and set out for this wonderful land in the north. And when they camped one night in the hill country of Ephraim near the house of Micah, the five men said to them,

"Do you know that there is in these houses an ephod, and household gods, and a carved and a molten image?

¹ (*Judges* 18: 8-10)

Now therefore decide what ye will do." And they turned aside there and came to the house of the young man the Levite, even the house of Micah, and greeted him. Meanwhile the six hundred men, who were of the Danites, girded with their weapons of war, stood by the entrance of the gate. But the five men who had gone to explore the land went up, entered in there, and took the carved image, and the ephod and the household gods, and the molten image, while the priest stood by the entrance of the gate with the six hundred men who were girded with weapons of war.

Perhaps this implies that the priest let them in at the village gate. Probably he knew that they wanted the image of Yahweh, but he did not know that they would walk right in and take it. When he saw them taking the things out of the shrine he said,

"What are you doing?" and they said to him, "Be still! Lay your hand upon your mouth, and go with us, and be a father and a priest to us! Is it better for you to be priest to one man's household, or to be priest to a tribe and a clan of Israel?" And the priest was glad, and he took the ephod, and the household gods, and the carved image and went along with the people.¹

Thus was Micah robbed of his image through the unfaithfulness of the Levite priest.

These robbers had traveled far north before Micah discovered his loss and gave chase with some of his neighbors, but the insulting Danites shouted back,

¹ (*Judges* 18: 18-20)

“What is the matter with you that you are out with such a crowd?”

And said Micah, “You have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and are gone away, and what have I left? What do you mean by asking, ‘What is the matter with you?’” And the Danites said to him, “Do not let your voice be heard among us, lest some fierce fellows fall upon you and you lose your life, with the lives of your household.”

Then the Danites went their way; and, since Micah saw that they were too strong for him, he turned and went back to his house.

Certainly these Danites were insolent and cruel. Pushing on to the fertile country which lies around the sources of the Jordan, they

came to Laish, to a people living in unsuspecting quiet, and put them to the sword, and burnt the city with fire. And they built the city and dwelt in it, and called the name of the city Dan. And the Danites set up for themselves the carved image.¹

How would you like to live as neighbors to Ehud, or the people of Dan? The idea makes you shudder, because you would not know what horrible thing they might be planning when they seemed most friendly.

It seems a miracle that out of people like these God could make a great nation that could teach the world about his justice and righteousness. People who stick daggers into others while they speak

¹ (*Judges* 18: 27-30)

friendly words; people who think there is no harm in actually stealing a god to pray to, have a long way to travel before they can be a great religious nation. This is the miracle of the Hebrew nation and this is just the kind of miracle we learn about in the Bible stories, the growth of unfair dangerous people into splendid, trustworthy people.

It is a question whether we should call these early people wicked, because they did not know any better. This was the way that all the desert people thought. Perhaps it was because they were not actually wicked, but doing the best they knew, that God could teach them better ways after a while. We shall have the pleasure of watching these primitive Hebrews grow to higher and higher ideas of God and life as they become a great nation.

CHAPTER IV

ISRAEL VICTORIOUS

Victory did not come at once to the Hebrews struggling to make homes in Canaan. Often they had to give up taking the great fortified cities and settle around them. For instance, one account says, "And Ephraim drove not out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer; but the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them." (*Judges* 1:29)

We can understand today the difficulty of taking a city like Gezer, because we have uncovered its ancient walls. They were fourteen feet thick. Two carriages side by side might drive on the top of them. About every ninety feet there were towers twenty-four by forty-one feet at the base. Of course we cannot tell how high they were. It was certainly wiser for Hebrews who knew little about cities not to attack such walls.

However, many victories came to Israel and were all the sweeter because they were hard won. Indeed, they rejoiced in them so much that they began to make songs about them. We have a little part of a war song left in the following verse:

Thou sun stand still in Gibeon,
And thou, moon, in the valley of Aijalon.
Then the sun stood still,

And the moon stayed

Until the nation had taken vengeance on its foes.

(*Joshua* 10:12-13) ¹

This celebrates some great battle in the region of Gibeon. Apparently victory came just at the setting of the sun, and it seemed to the singer of the song so wonderful that the light lasted just long enough for them to drive out their enemies, that he said the sun stood still to give Israel victory.

One of Israel's great victory songs we have complete in our Bible. It comes from the north of Israel and has to do with the people who lived around the plain of Esdraelon. This plain was desired by all people because its soil is so rich and it is so well watered by the many windings of the River Kishon. As you enter the plain today on the west where the Kishon flows into the Mediterranean Sea, Mount Carmel seems to stand straight up like a wall on your right. Then looking round you will realize that the reason the plain is so fertile is that it has many hills and mountains around its edge that are continually sending their water in streams into it. If you were to stand on one of these mountains and look down upon the plain you would feel as though you were looking at a variegated velvet carpet stretching for miles. The colors differ with the season of the year according to the color of the grains or flowers that are flourishing. In the early

¹ The text used for this song-fragment is from Kent's *Beginnings of Hebrew History*, p. 272, and his *Historical Bible*, Vol. II, *Founders and Rulers of United Israel*.

spring all is brilliant with red anemones and cyclamens; in June ripe grain rolls in waves like a golden sea. As the plain of Esdraelon with its mountains and rivers is today, so it was in the early days of Israel. It is not strange, therefore, that both the rulers of Israel and the Kings of Canaan desired this beautiful district. The first part of this victory song shows the readiness of the people to help in fighting and their thankfulness to Yahweh for victory.

Israel's Triumphal Ode

That the leaders took the lead in Israel,
That the people volunteered readily,
 Bless Yahweh!
Hear, O kings,
Give ear, O rulers,
I myself will sing to Yahweh,
I will sing praise to Yahweh the God of Israel.

Yahweh, when thou wentest forth from Seir,
When thou marchedst from the land of Edom,
The earth trembled, the heavens also dropped,
Yea, the clouds dropped water.
The mountains quaked before Yahweh,
Yon Sinai, before Yahweh the God of Israel.

(*Judges* 5: 2-5) ¹

You cannot read these lines without catching their spirit and rejoicing with the singer in the

¹ The text of this song is from Kent's *Beginnings of Hebrew History*, pp. 320-323.

coming of Yahweh across the mountains to the help of Israel. You see they still think of Yahweh as having his home down at the Holy Mountain in the desert, but he can come up when Israel needs him. His coming is magnificent, like the rolling up of a great thunder storm, for Yahweh is the god of the desert, the wind, and the rain.

In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath,
In the days of Jael, the highways were unused,
And travelers walked by roundabout paths,
The rulers ceased in Israel, they ceased,
Until thou, Deborah, didst arise,
Until thou didst arise a mother in Israel.
A shield was not seen in five cities,
Nor a spear among forty thousand.

(Judges 5: 6-8)

Here the singer takes us back to a state of things before the war. When Shamgar was judge, the Canaanites oppressed Israel so sorely that the roads were full of robbers. No one could travel except by roundabout ways. The roads were closed until Deborah arose. Who was Deborah? She was a prophetess who inquired the will of Yahweh, not in a shrine as did Micah's priest, but under a palm tree. Between Bethel and Ramah this palm tree of Deborah stood; under it sat this "mother in Israel" and gave help to people who asked her advice. It was, perhaps, in the movement of the leaves of the trees that she found signs of Yahweh's will.

Probably the stories that the people told her stirred Deborah against the Canaanites. A man would come running to her saying that the Canaanites had cut down all his newly ripened grain and another that they had taken his corn after he had threshed it and prepared it for food. Some told her how they had been attacked by robbers while they were on the way to visit the prophetess. Finally Deborah "arose" and sent for Barak to come and organize an army against these marauders. But it was Deborah who stirred up the people and the next verses tell us how they came to her call.

My heart is with the commanders of Israel,
Who volunteered readily among the people;

Bless Yahweh!

Proclaim it, you who ride on tawny asses,
Who sit on rich saddle cloths,
And you who walk by the way.
Far from the sound of the division of spoil,

In the places where water is drawn;
There let them rehearse the righteous acts of Yahweh,
Even the righteous acts of his rule in Israel.

Then the people of Yahweh went down to the gates, crying,
"Arise, arise, Deborah,
Arise, arise, strike up the song!
Arise, Barak, be strong,
And take thy captives, thou son of Abinoam!"
So a remnant went down against the powerful,
The people of Yahweh against the mighty:
From Ephraim they rushed forth into the valley,

Thy brother Benjamin among thy peoples,
From Machir went down commanders,
And from Zebulun those who carry the marshal's staff.
And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah;
And Naphtali was even so with Barak,
Into the valley they rushed at his back.

(*Judges 5:9-15*)

Here you can see the tribes of Israel marching to battle. Looking at the map you can see how far each one had to journey before the day of the attack. Perhaps you will not be surprised that those on the east of the Jordan, Reuben and Gad, did not come at all. Nor will you be surprised that the Danites did not care to go to much trouble for their neighbors. The story of their theft of Micah's idol shows that they did not mind treating the Israelites unfairly. They were always working for themselves, so why should they risk their lives for their brothers around their plain? These Danites now live up near the people of Tyre who make their living in the ships on the Mediterranean Sea. The poet heaps scorn upon the Danites for trying to be friends with the people of Tyre instead of with their own people. Asher, too, settled just south of Dan, must afterwards have been ashamed because of the contempt in which the poet held them for not helping. Reuben, of course, came in for reproof; he was still on the edge of the desert caring for his sheep. He knew little about the new life in Canaan and there were "great questionings" as to whether

to go to the help of Israel. Here are the words of the poet about the different tribes:

By the brooks of Reuben great were the resolves!
Why didst thou sit among the sheepfolds,
Listening to the pipings of the flocks?
By the brooks of Reuben there were great questionings!
Gilead remained beyond Jordan.
And Dan, why does he stay by the ships as an alien?
Asher sits still by the shore of the sea,
And remains by its landing places.

Zebulun was a people who exposed themselves to deadly
peril,

And Naphtali on the heights of the open field,
Bless Yahweh!

Kings came, they fought;
They fought, the kings of Canaan,
At Taanach by the waters of Megiddo;
They took no booty of silver.
From heaven fought the stars,
From their courses fought against Sisera.
The river Kishon swept them away,
The ancient river, the river Kishon.
O, my soul, march on with strength.
Then did the horse-hoofs resound
With the galloping, galloping of their steeds.

(*Judges* 5: 15-22)

Now the battle is on; out of the city of Taanach down into the plain rush the kings of Canaan in their chariots. Sisera, the great Canaanite general,

drove forth from his Taanach palace in his fine chariot, expecting an easy victory over the Hebrews who were only country people without horses and chariots. But, as the battle raged, the rumbling of the thunder was heard to the south making the mountains shake. On came the storm, filling the little streams till they ran gushing down into the river Kishon, filling its banks and overflowing into the plain. Of what use then were the splendid chariots of Sisera? The stars in their courses, the powers of heaven, the storm clouds were fighting on the side of Israel. The galloping, galloping of the horses could be heard as they plunged helplessly in the mud.

At last Sisera fled on foot alone. Through the village of Meroz he passed and they let him go instead of "coming to the help of Yahweh against the mighty." When, however, he stumbled into the tent of Jael, the Kenite, she did not let her enemy go. But let the poet finish the story:

Curse Meroz, said the messenger of Yahweh,
Curse bitterly its inhabitants;
Because they came not to the help of Yahweh,
To the help of Yahweh against the mighty.

Blessed among women shall Jael be,
That wife of Heber the Kenite,
Blessed above all nomad women!
Water he asked, milk she gave;
Curdled milk she brought him in a bowl fit for lords.

She put her hand to the tent pin,
Even her right hand to the workman's hammer;
And she struck Sisera, she crushed his head,
She shattered, she pierced his temple.
At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay still,
At her feet he bowed, he fell;
Where he bowed, there he fell a victim slain!

(Judges 5: 23-27)

Can you not see Jael's dark Arab face light up with terrible purpose as she sees that this worn out man before her asking water is her people's worst enemy? How polite and kind she seemed as she brought out her finest bowl filled with that most refreshing food of the east, curdled milk. Then when he buried his head in the bowl, drinking eagerly, crash came Jael's hammer or tent pin striking him down dead. How disgraceful for a warrior to fall down dead at the feet of a woman!

Then suddenly the poet takes us to the home of another woman, to the palace of Sisera's mother. There up in a tower of the palace in Taanach she had long been watching the battle through her lattice window.

Through the window peered and loudly cried,
The mother of Sisera, through the lattice,
Why is his chariot so long in coming?
Why are delayed the clatter of the hoofs of his scarlet horses?

The wisest of her ladies answered her,
Yea, she herself answered her question,

“Are they not indeed finding, dividing the spoil?
A woman or two for each of the warriors;
For Sisera a spoil of dyed stuffs,
A spoil of dyed stuffs embroidered,
A piece or two of embroidery for his neck?”

(*Judges 5: 28-30*)

From her lattice the mother of Sisera had seen the fighting crowds disappear from the fields during the storm. She supposed that the battle was over and her son would soon come home to tell her of his victory and bring her his prizes as he had often done before,— “A woman or two with beautiful and embroidered clothes.” But the moments have become hours and he has not come. Why? Surely they are waiting to divide the booty; Sisera could never be defeated.

Yet there he lies at the feet of Jael, and soon his mother must know the truth. The tragedy of her sorrow only makes Israel's victory seem the greater. The poet sums up all his faith in Yahweh and victory in the powerful closing lines of his song:

So shall all thine enemies perish, O Yahweh;
But they who love him shall be as the sun, rising in its
invincible splendor.

(*Judges 5: 31*)

How the song makes us shudder and rejoice! Terrible is Jael's deceitfulness and fury, yet she wins a victory for Yahweh. The people of Israel now belong completely to Yahweh; now they can be sure that they have not left him behind in the desert.

They know they can depend upon him to help them, and this makes them feel that they must all be true to him.

The writer of this great song of victory, then, did much to help make Israel a nation, for every time it was sung at a feast it would make the Hebrews more loyal to each other and to Yahweh. The deeds related in this song are terrible and cruel, but only as the Hebrews are true to the ideas of God which they already have can he lead them forward and show them that he is kinder and greater than they thought.

CHAPTER V

ISRAEL A KINGDOM

This splendid story introduces us to two of Israel's great men—Samuel the prophet, and Saul the king when he was a young man. Both of these men do important work toward making Israel a nation. Indeed, it was Samuel the prophet who saw that the people of Israel must have a king to finish the work of making them all one people. This was one reason that Samuel was called a seer, he could see things before others had thought of them. He saw that the next step in Israel's becoming a nation was to have a king.

The story of Samuel's anointing of Saul gives us a clear and vivid picture of the way the Hebrews were living in their new land. They still had feasts as in the days of the desert only they had them on the "high places." The day of the sacrificial feast on the high place was joyous for everybody. Samuel was like a father to them. The people would not eat a meal until Samuel had asked a blessing. Note, too, that the prophets are becoming more and more important in Israel. Nor was Samuel the only prophet, for a whole band of prophets met Saul. Probably they were chanting together and Saul joined them in singing songs of

praise to Yahweh. Saul came back from the search for his father's asses with new hopes—"God gave him a new heart." The first thing that he did was to go up to the high place at home, there probably to pray for guidance. What was he to do? He had gone to hunt asses and had found—a kingdom!

Soon Saul's opportunity came; Jabesh-Gilead to the east of the Jordan had been attacked. The people of Gilead had before come to the help of Israel at Taanach; should not the west Jordan tribes now help them? As Saul came home from his work in the fields one evening, he heard the story and the spirit of Yahweh came upon him, filling him with determination to stir up Israel to help their brothers. Cutting up one of his oxen, he sent bloody pieces to the Israelites as a token that it was their duty to fight. They followed Saul to victory and then made him the first king of Israel.

And all the people went to Gilgal; and there they made Saul king before Yahweh in Gilgal; and there they offered sacrifices of peace offerings before Yahweh; and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced exceedingly. (*I Sam.* 11:15.)

Now, thought the people, King Saul will deliver us from our enemy, the Philistines. The Philistines were people who had migrated into Palestine much as the Israelites had. Perhaps they had come across the great sea; the Mediterranean.

Have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Capthor—saith Yahweh? (*Amos* 9: 7.)

There are pictures of some Philistines on a wall in a temple of Egypt. They are tall men with up-standing hair. In Crete too, a disc has been found with a picture of a man with such hair. Perhaps then, Crete is Capthor, and it was from there that the Philistines came. At any rate it was from some such civilized place, for the Philistines knew how to build great cities. So powerful they were that Saul was not able to overcome them. This took the courage out of him. Then David came into Saul's life, when he came to play upon his lyre to the discouraged king. In time David gradually became the one to whom the people looked for help.

He took up the fight against the Philistines and when in battle Saul fell on his sword, David was proclaimed chief in the city of Hebron. Then he set forth in battle to win the whole land. But he did not win his kingdom easily, for there were rebellions against him for many years. During this time both David and his enemies did many bloody deeds that make us shudder today; for instance, when the land had been long needing rain, he hung the seven sons of Saul, "In the mountain before Yahweh." But David thought God wanted him to be a warrior and all warriors were cruel in those days. Soon he set out on a great conquest in which he treated conquered people with horrible cruelty.

Thus he made all the country around a part of Israel.

In a few years the little kingdom had more than doubled its extent. It reached from the Lebanon mountains and Damascus on the north down through Arabia to the Red Sea on the south; from far out in the desert on the east to the Mediterranean Sea on the west, except a strip which the Philistines still held. All this made one far reaching kingdom of Israel.

Not only did David give Israel new land, but a new and imposing capital. The city of Jerusalem was built on a tongue of rock extending out into deep valleys. The Jebusites, a Canaanite tribe, had held the city all the years since the coming of the Hebrews. It was hard to take the city because it was a natural fortress. Soldiers could not climb up on the east, south, or west, and of course the soldiers in the city fought any who tried to come in from the north. The Jebusites laughed at David and shouted,

"You shall not come in here, but the blind and the halt shall turn you away." But David surprised them by making his men crawl into the opening of the spring and up through a rock-cut tunnel into the city. Henceforth this Mount Zion became known as the "City of David." Here he planned a great palace decorated with cedar sent down by Hiram of Tyre.

David then had risen from a shepherd boy tending the flocks of his father to be ruler of a great kingdom. He made Israel a unified nation. Before

David, Israel was a loosely bound group of tribes; through him they became one organized people with the same love for Israel and the same trust in Yahweh.

But all this was not done merely by killing Israel's enemies and taking much land. It was really done more by love than by force, for people loved David, and would gladly risk their lives for him. Once David said, "Oh that I had some water to drink from the well that is by the gate of Bethlehem." Although Bethlehem was then in the hands of the Philistines, three of David's men cut their way through the enemy, and got some water from the well. But when they brought it to David, he would not drink it, for it seemed to him like drinking the blood of the men who had risked their lives to get it, so he poured it out as an offering to Yahweh. David seems to have carried an ephod with him and through it to have asked Yahweh's advice before undertaking anything. For instance, in *I Sam.* 23: 9-11, we read,

When David knew that Saul was devising evil against him, he said to Abiathar the priest, Bring here the ephod. And David said, O Yahweh, the God of Israel, thy servant hath surely heard that Saul is seeking to come to Keilah to destroy the people because of me. Will Saul come down as thy servant hath heard? O Yahweh, God of Israel, I beseech thee, tell thy servant. And Yahweh said, He will come down.

Nobody knows exactly what an ephod was, since

the word "ephod" seems sometimes to mean an image, sometimes an ark, and sometimes a ceremonial garment. Once David "was girded with a linen ephod." (*II Sam.* 6:14) Perhaps in this case it was a linen girdle in which were carried some stones for casting lots. It was some method of taking a chance and thinking that Yahweh would guide the chance.

Later, people learned to pray to Yahweh without an ephod, but the great thing was that David helped people to feel that it was important not to forget their God.

Finally David, in his very last days when sorrow had come to him from many sources, provided a religious center for Israel.

In Jerusalem there was a holy rock long held sacred by the Jebusites. During all the thirty years that David ruled as king in Jerusalem he had not robbed the Jebusites of their sacred rock. The regard for his conquered enemy's religion certainly shows a fine side to his character. But he hoped before his death to make friendly plans with Araunah, the Jebusite, who owned the rock, in order that Israel might worship Yahweh there.

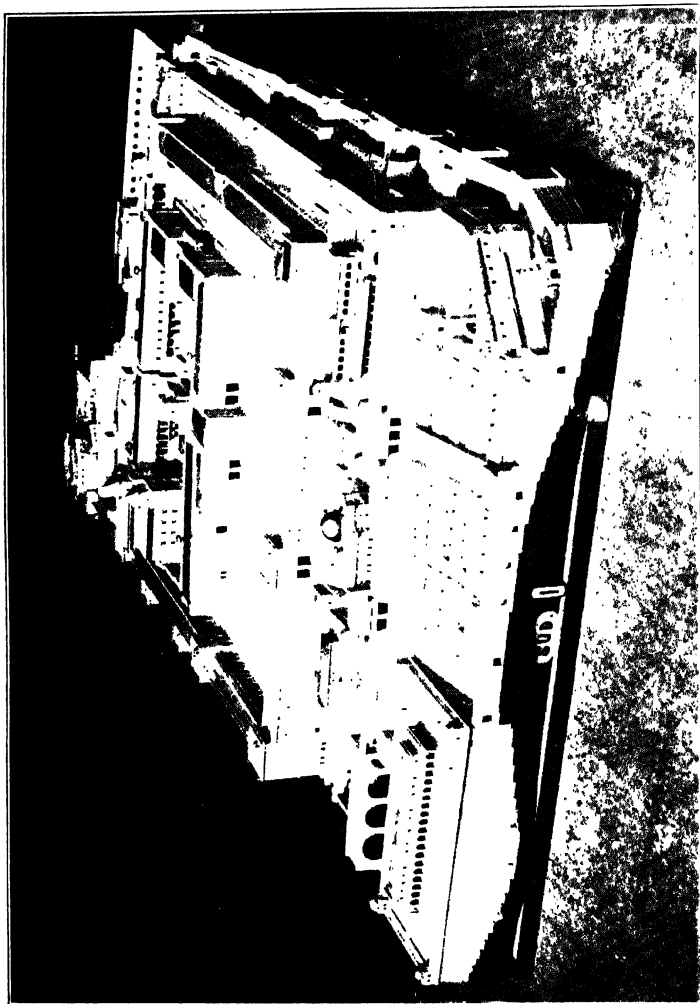
The threshing floor of a people in those days was often the place where they worshiped their god with sacrificial feasts. The holy rock in Jerusalem seems to have been the threshing floor of the Jebusites under the care of Araunah. This rock can be seen today in Jerusalem carefully guarded. Under the highest point is a cave and at the entrance of

the cave there is a spot worn smooth by kissing. Probably the Jebusites wore this spot smooth.

It was the coming of a pestilence which gave David a chance to procure the rock. A prophet suggested to him that if he would build an altar to Yahweh on the holy place, perhaps the pestilence would cease. So David went to seek Araunah.

And when Araunah looked down and saw the king and his servants crossing over to him, Araunah went out and bowed to the king with his face to the ground. And Araunah said, Why has my lord the king come to his servant? and David said, To buy the threshing floor from you to build an altar to Yahweh. . . . And Araunah said to the king, Yahweh your God accept you! And the king answered Araunah, No, but I will surely buy it from you at a price. I must not offer burnt offerings to Yahweh my God that cost me nothing. So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. (*II Sam.* 24:20-24)

Thus David secured the spot that became a sacred center for all Israel, and through Israel to the whole world. We have now seen Israel acquire plenty of land, a capital city, a strong king, and a central shrine. Is it yet a great nation?



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THE TEMPLE OF SOLOMON

CHAPTER VI

THE GLORY OF SOLOMON

Now Solomon sat upon the throne of David his father. And the King went to Gibeon to sacrifice there; for that was the great high place; a thousand burnt offerings did Solomon offer upon the altar. (*I Kings* 2:12; 3:4)

Jerusalem had not yet become the center of the Hebrew nation because it had no temple. This was the work which lay before the new king, to make Jerusalem the site of the chief temple and so the religious capital of the empire which David had builded. As soon therefore as he had put to death various enemies and had collected wood and stone, he began building on the mountain which David had bought from Araunah, the Jebusite.

Hiram, King of Tyre, that beautiful Phœnician city jutting out into the sea, was one of the people that had "loved David." He was glad to make plans with Solomon to send down cedar timber from the splendid trees growing up in the Lebanon mountains. Solomon offered to send up some of his own servants for the trees but added, "You know that there is no one among us who knows how to cut timber as the Sidonians." (*I Kings* 5:6) Would you not like to see one of those men from the city of Sidon, who was such a skilful tree chop-

per? Would he be very large and strong, one wonders, or simply "skilful" in knowing how to chop the tree so that it would crash down in just the place it was wanted?

That it was a great achievement to get these great trees out of the Lebanon is shown by the boast of an old Assyrian King written on a tablet: "That which no former King had accomplished I did.—I cut a road for cedars, massive, tall, strong cedars, of wonderful beauty, whose dark appearance was impressive, the mighty products of the Lebanon."¹

How do you suppose King Hiram got these trees down to Jerusalem? He said to Solomon, "I will make them into rafts to go by sea to the place that you shall appoint, and will have them broken up there and you shall receive them." (*I Kings* 5 : 9) So the great rafts came sailing down the coast till they, perhaps, came near to Joppa where Solomon's men took them and cut them up into pieces needed for the buildings. In return Solomon gave to Hiram "four hundred thousand bushels of wheat for food for his household, and one hundred and sixty thousand gallons of oil from the beaten olives. This much Solomon gave to Hiram year by year." (*I Kings* 5 : 11) This is the way it came about that Solomon was able to build his palace and the temple out of beautiful fragrant cedars from the Lebanon.

Of course it took several years to do all this work and while the building was going on Solomon did

¹ These are the words of Nebuchadrezzar, King of Babylon. See Rogers' *Cuneiform Parallels to the Old Testament*, p. 366.

other things to increase the glory of Israel. He went down to Egypt where he was received with great magnificence and won the daughter of Pharaoh for his wife. Imagine the picture for yourselves of the powerful dignified Pharaoh of the Egyptians sitting on his throne with his attendants waving fans behind him. Before him appears Solomon in all his glory. His fine clothing would make the on-lookers forget that he came from the new and small kingdom of Israel. Bowing low before the throne he was graciously invited up to speak with the king and possibly to meet his daughter. Solomon must have seemed to Pharaoh to be a pleasing young monarch, for he offered to give him his daughter in marriage and a city for a wedding present.

After much feasting, Solomon brought his bride home to Jerusalem and great was the rejoicing and splendor. Now, thought many of the people, we are at last a great nation; are we not almost as fine as Egypt?

Let us, now, make believe that we have been invited to Solomon's magnificent wedding feast, to be held in the "House of the Forest of Lebanon." Everything fine from various countries, dishes of silver and gold and ivory, beautiful clothing, delicious foods and spices, and even apes and peacocks to add to the gayety are around us, with the Egyptian queen as the center of everybody's attention. Wine and figs and olives and sour milk and other delicacies are freely passed to everybody. Then comes the moment of great interest in every feast,

the time for the story to be told. (Read *I Kings* 10: 21-23.)

In the spacious hall fragrant with carved cedar wood arises the story teller. All eyes are fixed upon him as he begins:

In the day that Yahweh made earth and heaven, no plant of the field was yet on the earth, and no herb of the field had yet sprung up, for Yahweh had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; but a mist used to rise from the earth and water the whole face of the ground. (*Genesis* 2: 4-6)

Ah, he is telling the story of the very beginning of things. Long, long ago at the beginning of the world there was no life, because there was no rain. With rain came everything; but what about man, did he grow too?

Then Yahweh (continued the story teller) formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Thus man became a living being. (*Gen.* 2: 7)

Oh, it took more than rain to make man; Yahweh himself shaped him out of the ground and blew his breath into the image. How wonderful it must have been to see the image come alive! Man, then, is made of two things, so the people thought, as they listened in wonder, earth and the breath of Yahweh. But where did this new made man live? shouts some one, (for people asked questions of story tellers in those days) and the story teller replies,

And Yahweh planted a garden in Eden, far in the East, and placed there the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground Yahweh made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. (*Gen.* 2: 9)

“He meant everything to be good, then,” shouts a hearer. But who brought evil into the world?”

Ah, the evil came through a woman, a tree, and a serpent. It was the tree of knowledge of good and evil, a serpent that could talk, and the woman. Woman? How did Yahweh make woman?

“Yahweh said,” continued the story teller, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make a helper suited to him.”

Therefore out of the ground Yahweh formed all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the heavens, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature that was its name. Thus the man gave names to all cattle and all the beasts of the field; but for the man himself there was found no helper suited to him.

Then Yahweh caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, so that he slept; and he took one of his ribs, and closed up its place with flesh. But the rib, which he had taken from the man, Yahweh fashioned into a woman and brought her to the man. Then said the man,

This, now, is bone of my bone

And flesh of my flesh.

This one shall be called woman,

For from man she was taken.

(*Gen.* 2: 18-23)

But how did the woman bring evil? The serpent came and told her that if they ate of the tree of knowledge they would "be as gods, knowing good and evil." How could she help wishing that they might be as gods? So "she took the fruit and gave also to her husband with her and he ate." Then they looked around in their garden and took some fig-leaves and sewed them together for clothes.

When, that evening, they

heard the sound of the footsteps of Yahweh Elohim, as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of Yahweh Elohim among the trees of the garden.

And Yahweh Elohim called to the man and said to him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard the sound of thy footsteps in the garden and I was afraid,—so I hid myself. Then he said,—Hast thou eaten of the tree from which I commanded thee not to eat? And the man said, The woman whom thou didst place beside me, she gave me from the tree and I ate. When Yahweh Elohim said to the woman, What is this thou hast done? the woman replied, The serpent beguiled me and I ate. Then said Yahweh to the man,

Cursed be the ground because of thee,
By painful toil shalt thou eat from it all the days of thy
life.

Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth for thee,
And thou shalt eat the herb of the field.

By the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread,

Until thou return to the ground,

Because from it thou wast taken;

For dust thou art,
And to dust shalt thou return.¹

(*Gen.* 3: 8-13, 17-19)

So that is why they have to work so hard, is it? Perhaps this is what some of the slaves thought as they listened. Solomon has indeed given us plenty of "painful toil," some of the men may have said who had brought the fine things to Jerusalem for the king. But most people were so proud of Solomon with all his fine clothes that they felt sorry for the first man and woman who had only fig-leaves and no house.

One of the many houses Solomon planned was a magnificent palace for his Egyptian wife. But the more palaces Solomon built, the more people there were who kept thinking, Why should we be slaves for Solomon? For the truth is that Solomon made people work for him in much the same way that Pharaoh of Egypt long ago had forced them to make bricks.

King Solomon raised a forced levy out of all Israel; and the levy consisted of thirty thousand men. And he sent them to Lebanon, ten thousand a month in relays; a month they were in Lebanon, and two months at home; and Adoniram was in charge of the forced levy. And Solomon had seventy thousand burden-bearers and eighty thousand hewers of stone in the mountains. (*I Kings* 5: 13-15)

Beside all these people working for him up in the

¹ From Kent's *Beginnings of Hebrew History*, p. 56.

mountains, Solomon had a fleet of ships in Ezion-Geber down on the Red Sea. These ships were manned by slave-seamen who went out hunting gold and precious stones and red sandal wood to bring back to Solomon. In fact all Israel was working for Solomon either as laborers or as superintendents. (Read *I Kings* 9: 23, 26-28; 10: 11, 12.)

There was a young man named Jeroboam who had such great ability that Solomon "placed him over all the forced levy of the house of Joseph." He was overseer of a band of workers in Jerusalem which enlarged foundations for the buildings to be placed on Mount Zion. When he saw how the people were driven as slaves he left and went back to his own little town of Zeredah. Probably many of his friends knew that he had thrown up the splendid opportunity which Solomon had given him because he could not bear to see his people made slaves. He might have been a rich man if he had been willing to be a slave-driver.

After he had gone back to Zeredah he was not forgotten, for one day a man from Jerusalem came hunting for him. This was Ahijah, a prophet, who may have been sent by some of the Jerusalem slaves. He found Jeroboam going along the road and he took him aside into a field.

Now Ahijah had clad himself with a new garment; and they two were alone in the field. Then Ahijah took hold of the new garment, that was on him, and rent it in twelve pieces. And he said to Jeroboam, Take for yourself ten pieces; for thus saith Yahweh, the God of Israel, Be-

hold I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon and will give ten tribes to thee, but he shall have one tribe. (*I Kings* 11:26-32)

Ah, this meant revolution! What should Jeroboam do? Go to Jerusalem and call on the slaves to revolt against Solomon? Probably Jeroboam went back to Jerusalem with Ahijah and tried to get the people to rise up and refuse to be slaves because it is stated that "Solomon sought to kill Jeroboam." But Jeroboam's attempt was not successful because Solomon's power was too great, and because many people enjoyed his "glory."

"Then Jeroboam arose and fled to Egypt, to Shishak, King of Egypt, and was in Egypt till the death of Solomon." (*I Kings* 11:40)

Solomon, in spite of some trouble, was able to continue his plans. To make his kingdom more safe he fortified various towns. One of them was the city of Gezer which Pharaoh had given as a wedding gift to his daughter. This city of Gezer has been dug out and some stone towers have been found which Solomon built. Two methods Solomon took to save his kingdom from attack, fortifications and friendships. He found that if he made friends with people they would not try to overthrow him. In those days people cared especially about their kinsmen and would not often go to war against them. Solomon had made the Pharaoh of Egypt his kinsman by marrying his daughter. This seemed a good plan for making many other people his kinsmen

and friends. So Solomon went to all the little kings round and asked for their daughters in marriage. Probably the daughters thought it a fine thing to marry a king with so much "glory." Stories say that Solomon had seven hundred wives! No wonder that he had to build homes to keep his wives and be prepared to entertain their relatives.

But though this plan of making marriages with all his neighbors brought him peace, it brought trouble, too, for all these wives wanted to worship their own gods and they had to have temples and high places for this purpose. Also they expected Solomon to worship all their gods and he hardly had any time left to worship Yahweh. For this, however, he made up by building for Yahweh a magnificent temple, not unlike the great temples of Egypt, some of which are still standing today. We have no picture of Solomon's temple but the descriptions in our Bible tell us what some of the temple priests remembered about it. Underneath the temple mount today is a quarry of the beautiful white stone that was probably used. The temple was built of stone and cedar. It was not meant as a building in which the people should meet but as a dwelling place for Yahweh, and therefore was not large. People came together in the court outside.

The temple was situated just west of the holy rock which David had bought from Araunah, the Jebusite. The rock was used as the altar for burnt offerings.

At the entrance to the porch were two beautiful

brass pillars. In the Holy Place was a table of bread and ten golden candlesticks. Around the top of the room was ornamented lattice work letting in a little light. But the Holy of Holies was entirely dark. It contained a sacred ark which had winged figures on the top called cherubim. Here Yahweh was thought to dwell. When Solomon dedicated the temple he said,

Yahweh has set the sun in the heavens
But himself has willed to dwell in darkness.
I have therefore built thee a house to dwell in,
A home for thee for eternity.

(*I Kings* 8: 12, 13) ¹

Solomon, then, brought both good and bad to the Hebrews. The temple became of great importance as a center, but the slave labor with which it was built made many people turn away from it, and brought the weakening of the kingdom by revolution and division.

¹ See H. P. Smith's *Old Test. Hist.*, p. 169.

CHAPTER VII

THE KINGDOM DIVIDED

The successor to Solomon and all his glory was Rehoboam, his son. He had grown up in luxury and would naturally expect to make Israel more glorious than ever. The enemies that had risen against Solomon, he did not think important. Surely they and all the people would be so proud of the glory of Israel that they would gladly work for the new king.

As soon as the funeral and the days of mourning for Solomon were past, we may be sure that his palaces were again filled with joyous feasting multitudes. Some people were glad because the feasts gave them a chance for new pleasures, and some were sad because it meant that they must keep on working like slaves.

Let us imagine that we are in the halls of cedar again, attending a magnificent banquet given by Rehoboam in honor of his coronation. Rich foods from Egypt he has given his guests and wine in abundance. Many are half drunk but some are watching and thinking what they will do to save themselves from being slaves any longer to such a useless king.

"Where is the story teller?" some one shouts, "Now that we can eat and drink no more let the story teller entertain us." Forth he is dragged into the center; but he sees that most of them are too far gone in drink to hear much, so he begins the old story of the flood which came to punish men for their wickedness. First he perhaps reminded them that the hero of his story was Noah who once was so drunk in his tent that all his sons were ashamed of him. When he "woke from his wine," (*Gen. 9: 24*) he also was ashamed. Noah was the one who according to the story saved men and animals from all being destroyed in the flood. Then the story teller told

THE STORY OF THE FLOOD¹

When Yahweh saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every purpose in the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually, Yahweh regretted that he had made man on the earth and it grieved him to his heart. Therefore Yahweh said, I will destroy from the face of the ground man whom I have created, for I regret that I have made them.

But Noah found favor in the eyes of Yahweh. And Yahweh said to Noah, Make an ark of cypress wood. And Noah did according to all that Yahweh commanded him.

Then Yahweh said to Noah, Enter thou and all thy

¹ This is the oldest story of the Flood, taken from the "*Judean Story-Book*." Parts of it are found in *Gen. 6: 5-8: 22*. This is the putting together of that old story by C. F. Kent in his *Beginnings of Hebrew Hist.*, pp. 63-67.

house into the ark; for thee have I found righteous before me in this generation. Of all clean beasts thou shalt take to them by sevens, male and his mate, but of the beasts that are not clean by twos, a male and his mate; and of the clean birds of the heavens, seven by seven, to keep offspring alive upon the face of the earth. For after seven days I will cause it to rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights; and every living thing that I have made will I destroy from off the face of the ground. And Noah did according to all that Yahweh commanded him.

And it came to pass after the seven days that the waters of the flood came upon the earth. Then Noah, together with his sons and his wife, and his sons' wives, entered into the ark, because of the waters of the flood. Of clean beasts, and beasts that are not clean, and of birds, and of everything that creeps upon the ground there went in two by two to Noah into the ark. And Yahweh shut him in.

And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights, and the waters increased and bore up the ark, and it was lifted high above the earth. All in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was on the land, died. Thus Yahweh destroyed everything that existed upon the face of the ground, both man and animals, and creeping things, and birds of the heavens, so that they were destroyed from the earth; and Noah only was left and they that were with him in the ark.

But it came to pass at the end of forty days that the rain from heaven ceased, and the waters retired continually from off the land.

Then Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made; and he sent forth a raven, and it kept going to and fro, until the waters were dried up from off the earth.

And he sent forth from him a dove to see if the waters had subsided from off the face of the ground; but the dove found no rest for the sole of its foot, and it returned to him in the ark, for the waters were on the face of the whole earth, and he stretched forth his hand and took her and brought her to him into the ark.

Then he waited seven days more and again sent forth the dove from the ark. And the dove came in to him at eventide; and, lo, there was in her mouth a freshly plucked olive leaf. So Noah knew that the waters had subsided from off the earth. And he waited seven days more and sent forth the dove; but it did not return to him again.

Then Noah removed the covering of the ark and looked, and behold, the face of the ground was dry. And Noah built an altar to Yahweh, and took of every clean beast and of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

And when Yahweh smelled the pleasant odor, Yahweh said in his heart, I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the purpose of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again smite everything that lives, as I have done.

While the earth remains,
Seedtime and harvest,
Cold and heat,
Summer and winter,
Day and night,
Shall not cease.

By the time the story teller had finished, many had gone to sleep, overcome by their gluttony and wine. Now is the time, thought the slaves and the

people whom Jeroboam had talked to about revolt, to let the king feel our power. So they went to him and said,

“Your father made our yoke intolerable. Now, therefore, make the intolerable service of your father and the heavy yoke he laid upon us lighter, and we will serve you.”
(*I Kings* 12:4)

No doubt their mutterings and threatening hands showed that they would not serve him if he did not change matters. The king was overwhelmed. He did not dare refuse and he certainly was not ready to grant their request. Finally he answered,

“Go away for three days, then come again to me.” During those three days Rehoboam took counsel with the old men who had been the early counsellors of Solomon. He asked also the young men. They had seen Solomon succeed, they had been given high places by him, they had lost all sympathy with the people who did the work. The old men said, “Give them a favorable answer, then they will be your servants forever.” But the young men thought it would be better to answer harshly so that the power of the king would frighten the people. (Read *I Kings* 12:6-11)

So when all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king bade, saying, “Come to me the third day,” the king answered the people harshly. He said to them,

My father made your yoke heavy, but I also will make your yoke still heavier; my father chastised you with

whips, but I will chastise you with scourges. (*I Kings* 12: 14.)

But Rehoboam did not know the people. They had made up their minds not to be frightened into being slaves any longer. So when they "saw that the king gave no heed to the people," they shouted out their words of revolution:

What share have we in David?

We have no claim in the son of Jesse!

To your tents, O Israel!

Now care for your house, O David!

(*I Kings* 12: 16)

Rehoboam hoped that he could still force the people to work for him. So he sent to them Adoniram, the man whom they all knew as the chief slave-driver. When they saw him they were filled with indignation and stoned him to death on the spot. Then the king, to get away from the tumult, "quickly mounted his chariot" and fled for his life.

Thus was the kingdom which David and Solomon had moulded into unity broken apart by injustice. Henceforth we have two kingdoms, Judah, with Jerusalem as its capital, and Israel, as the new kingdom to the north called itself. The young Jeroboam was proclaimed king in the north and he made the city of Shechem his capital. Rehoboam was still ruler of Judah but he had by his injustice to the workers separated the great mass of the Hebrew people from their Judean kinsmen.

Jeroboam was so determined that the people should not be tempted to go back to Jerusalem to worship at the temple that he made two places for people to worship in the north, at Bethel and at Dan. Here he set up two golden calves and he said to the people,

Behold your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt! (*I Kings* 12:28)

People did not seem to think this strange, so they went to Bethel and Dan and paid little attention to Solomon's fine temple in Jerusalem.

The temple was neglected, too, by the people in Jerusalem because they worshiped at high places all around the city where there were older pillars and trees. Rehoboam did nothing to make the city better or more beautiful. He just had a good time with the fine things that his father had left him and proved himself a weakling. In his fifth year the temple had its treasures stolen by Shishak, Pharaoh of Egypt. On the walls of a gateway in Egypt are the names of towns in Israel that Shishak also conquered. When kinsmen fight each other it is an invitation to outsiders to come and rob them both.

In Solomon and Rehoboam, then, we see two kings who might have done much to make the Hebrews a great nation, but they failed because of their selfishness and love of fine things. These desert people had now become wealthy, but riches are not greatness so long as rulers are selfish and their people slaves. The people of Israel made a bold stroke

for freedom. As we follow the story of this new northern Kingdom, let us see whether they become a freer and a greater people than Judah.

THE KINGDOM DIVIDED

A Drama

CHARACTERS:

KING REHOBOAM	ELIASHIB
JEROBOAM	ZERUAH, MOTHER OF
ABIJAH, THE PROPHET	JEROBOAM
ADONIRAM, THE KING'S	ABIGAIL
SERVANT	AZRA, SON OF ABIGAIL.

SCENE: *A rough country road near the village of Zeredah. Rocks and small trees by the roadside.*

SCENE I

JEROBOAM: (*entering slowly*) How dare he make us slaves? (*Walks on thoughtfully.*)

ELIASHIB: (*entering from opposite direction*) Salaam, Jero-boam, why art thou here? Is it not true that Solomon has placed thee over all the forced levy of the house of Joseph?

JEROBOAM: Yes, so he hath. But why should I force my brothers to work for the glorious apparel of King Solomon?

ELIASHIB: Great things have I heard of thee in Jerusalem. Solomon hath declared to all that thou dost show great ability and industry in his building.

JEROBOAM: Truly he hath much praise for those who do his work without murmuring.

ZERUAH: (*entering hurriedly*) Ah, here thou art; I cannot bear to lose thee for an hour. (*Bowing to ELIASHIB*) Is it not well to have him again in Zeredah?

ELIASHIB: That it is, yet hath he turned his back on great joy.

I saw thy son at the great feast in the house of the forest of Lebanon. He was seated not far from the king. Why should he throw away that splendor for naught?

JEROBOAM: For naught sayest thou? For freedom; for Israel's birthright. Why did Moses lead us out of Egypt? Because we would not be slaves. Because Israel was born in the free air of the desert. Shall we now let one of our own rulers make us mere bricklayers as Pharaoh did? Will Yahweh be our god if we are slaves?

ZERUAH: Yahweh delighteth in the strong. Surely thou shalt find favor in his sight.

ELIASHIB: (to JEROBOAM) Peradventure thou speakest truly, but today men fear to speak. They have no bread if they speak the thoughts of their hearts.

ABIGAIL: (*entering with haste and falling at the feet of JEROBOAM*) Oh, help me! canst thou not free my son? Adoniram is dragging him off to build for the king; here he comes; O speak to him!

(ADONIRAM *enters with young fellow bound. ABIGAIL falls on knees. JEROBOAM steps out into the road.*)

JEROBOAM: O Adoniram, chief of the forced labor, leave, I pray you, this boy with his mother, since she is a widow and needeth his help.

ADONIRAM: Can the king's business stop for poor widows? Thou, O Jeroboam, hast refused the favors of the king. His officers are seeking thee. Draw not others to destruction with thee. (*Drags boy out.*)

ABIGAIL: O Yahweh, wilt thou not deliver thy children?

JEROBOAM: Yea, deliver us from the glory of Solomon and the hard-heartedness of his servants. (*He starts after ADONIRAM.*)

ZERUAH: (*stopping him*) Nay, thou shalt not now expose thyself to death. (*To ABIGAIL*) Come, my house shall be thy house until thy son return.

ELIASHIB: (*assisting ABIGAIL*) Let me help thee.

ZERUAH: (*helping to support ABIGAIL, turns as she is leaving*) Wait my son, wait, till Yahweh shall open the door as he did when Moses led the people forth.

JEROBOAM: (*sits thoughtfully on a rock*) O Yahweh, wilt thou free thy people?

ABIJAH: (*entering with an air of mystery*) Jeroboam, son of Nebat, I would speak to thee alone. (*Draws him to side of road.*)

JEROBOAM: Bringest thou a message from Yahweh?

ABIJAH: (*taking off new cloak rends it*) Take for thyself ten pieces; for thus saith Yahweh, the god of Israel, behold I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee.

JEROBOAM: Shall the kingdom then be divided? The kingdom of David?

ABIJAH: Yea, Solomon hath broken the kingdom. Now are we united and slave or divided and free.

JEROBOAM: (*falling on his knees*) Oh, I pray thee, when is the day? To Jerusalem may I now go and rouse the people to throw off the yoke of slavery?

ABIJAH: Nay, Solomon seeks thy life; flee to Pharaoh and wait till the death of Solomon, then come and be a Moses to the people! (*Exit ABIJAH.*)

JEROBOAM: To Egypt! there where slavery thrives! There will Yahweh teach me to be a Moses to the people.

ZERUAH: (*enters in time to hear JEROBOAM's last words*) Thou, a Moses to the people? So have I always thought, for thy father, Nebat, dedicated thee to Yahweh's service. Goest thou now to Jerusalem to arouse the people? I will go with thee. I will strengthen thy hand.

JEROBOAM: Alas, I must wait. Abijah, the prophet, hath sought me out. See these ten pieces of his garment as token that I shall be king over ten tribes.

ZERUAH: O strike now; thou canst win, the people are with thee.

JEROBOAM: Nay, Solomon's task-masters are too strong; they hold the people's lives in their hands. The prophet is right, I must flee to Egypt.

ZERUAH: Must the widowed mother be bereft once more?

JEROBOAM: Thou art strong; thou art both father and mother to me; thou must wait. Didst thou hear the words of Adoniram

that the king's officers are seeking me? Soon they may be here. Farewell, Yahweh protect thee. (*Exit JEROBOAM.*)

ZERUAH: O Yahweh, guide him, make him a Moses to the people.

SCENE II

REHOBOAM: (*on throne.*) *On one side old men counsellors, opposite, young men counsellors. (Turning to old men.)* O ye counsellors of my father, hear me. The insolent people have said to me, "Make the yoke that your father put upon us lighter!" What answer do you advise me to give this people?

OLD MAN COUNSELLOR: If now you will be a servant to this people, and will serve them, and give them a favorable answer, then will they be your servants forever.

REHOBOAM: Why favor them? My father Solomon commanded them.

YOUNG COUNSELLOR: Yea, why favor them?

OLD MAN: Thy father made friends with them first, and they were proud of him; therefore were they slaves.

SECOND OLD MAN: First win their hearts, then will they work for thee.

REHOBOAM: Have I not given them splendid feasts? What more can I do? Shall the king humble himself to talk with his slaves? (*Turning to young men*) What answer do you advise us to give to this people who have spoken to me, saying, "Make the yoke that your father put upon us lighter."

YOUNG COUNSELLOR: Thus must you answer this people. "My little finger is thicker than my father's loins! And now whereas my father loaded you with a heavy yoke, I will make your yoke heavier; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges."

SECOND YOUNG COUNSELLOR: That will fill them with terror and they will go back to their work without a murmur.

THIRD YOUNG COUNSELLOR: Be harsh with them that they may know that there will be no hope, then will they go away quietly.

REHOBOAM: Your words are wisest; we have grown up together

and know the new times. Ye old men counsel well for other days.
(*Noise outside. Enter crowd.*)

ARZA, SON OF ABIGAIL: Thy three days are passed; what answer dost thou give the people?

REHOBAM: (*harshly*) My little finger is thicker than my father's loins. My father loaded you with a heavy yoke, but I will make your yoke heavier; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges.

CROWD: Scourges, whips?

ARZA: Thou knowest, O king, that we will no longer be thy subjects. Jeroboam shall be our Moses and our king.

CROWD: Jeroboam our Moses!

JEROBAM: (*coming forward*) Thou hast degraded the house of David and therefore divided it. Now care for your own house, O David! To your tents, O Israel!

YOUNG MAN COUNSELLOR: What insolent words are these? Return to your labor, ye dogs.

ABIGAIL: No more shall our sons build your palaces. (REHOBAM *lifts his hand to command, but stops as he sees ABIJAH coming forward.*)

ABIJAH: By thee is the house of David broken in twain. (*Holding up two strips of his garment*) Here are two tribes for thee; ten has Yahweh given to Jeroboam. Go not out to fight against thy kinsman, for all this is according to the word of Yahweh.

CROWD: Jeroboam, the new Moses, the king of Israel! Freedom and life!

OLD MAN COUNSELLOR: (*to the king*) Flee for thy life.

YOUNG MAN COUNSELLOR: Send Adoniram. (*Exit king.*)

JEROBAM: What share have we in David? We have no claim in the son of Jesse!

ADONIRAM: (*entering furiously with scourge in hand*) What mean ye, insolent slaves? Tomorrow the king receiveth ambassadors from Egypt. Food must we have and wine. Go. (*Strikes one of them*) Bring your portions to the king.

CROWD: Slaves? We have a new king. Go thyself. (CROWD *forces him out.*)

JEROBOAM: To your tents, O Israel. Say farewell to Jerusalem. Henceforth will we worship Yahweh in the sanctuaries of Israel; there shall ye yourselves be priests unto the God who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. Come quickly, let us journey to Shechem. (*Leads the people forth.*)

CHAPTER VIII

ELIJAH THE PROPHET AND AHIAB THE KING

Jeroboam had founded the kingdom of Israel with all the people free from slavery, but when he died there seemed to be no man big enough to take his place. Revolution followed revolution until finally Omri, a general of the army, was proclaimed king. Thus was founded the house of Omri. Omri also built a city to be the capital for his house. He saw a hill rising up like a fort in a plain and thought what a splendid capital it would make; so he bought it and built on it and named it Samaria, after the man who sold it to him. The foundations of this palace of Omri in Samaria have been dug out by some of our American explorers. They found the stones fitted to the rock at the top of the hill.

From the Hebrew writings we know no more about Omri, but an engraved stone has been found in the wilderness of Moab which tells us more. A clergyman who was traveling in Moab saw the top of a tablet sticking up among the rocks. It was just like finding a piece of our Bible out there in the wilderness for, when scholars afterward read it, they found it was written in the same style as the Bible

and that it told about the Israelite King Omri. It was called the Moabite Stone because it was set up by the king of Moab at the city of Dibon. Here are parts of the inscription:

“I am Mesha, son of Chemoshmelek, king of Moab, the Dibonite. My father ruled over Moab thirty years, and I ruled after my father. And I made this high place to Chemosh in Quarhah because of the deliverance of Mesha, because he saved me from all the kings and because he caused me to see (my desire) upon all who hated me. Omri, king of Israel—he oppressed Moab many days, because Chemosh was angry with his land.”

This shows us that Omri went over and conquered the Moabites and that they said that this trouble came upon them because Chemosh, their god, was angry with them. They built high places for their god just as Jeroboam did for Yahweh at Bethel and Dan. The rest of the stone tablet tells us also about a defeat of the son of Omri, whom we know as Ahab.

“Now Omri had possessed all the land of Medeba and dwelt in it all his days and half the days of his son.— The King of Israel had built for himself Ataroth. And I fought against the city and took it, and I slew all the people of the city, a sight (pleasing) to Chemosh and to Moab.— And Chemosh said to me: “Go take Nebo against Israel”; and I went by night and fought against it from break of dawn till noon, and I took it and slew all, seven thousand men, boys, women, and girls, for I had

devoted it to Ashtar—Chemosh. And I took from there the altar-hearth of Yahweh.”

We have been sorry to see how cruel the Hebrews were from the days when Lamech sang his “Song of the Sword” up to the time when Solomon made slaves of his brothers. Perhaps we have been surprised to find that they always thought Yahweh would be pleased with their harshness. But this Moabite Stone lets us see that everybody practiced cruelty in those days. Each little nation had its own god who, they thought, was pleased with harsh treatment of their enemies. It is very hard indeed for any nation to have thoughts entirely different from its neighbor nations.

You will not be greatly surprised, then, to find that we must next tell the story of the wicked and cruel King Ahab, the son of Omri. Jeroboam had set up the kingdom of Israel in the north because he wanted freedom for the people. But now there came a king who cared more about finery than freedom. Ahab tried to make himself a kind of magnificent Solomon. He built himself an “ivory” palace on the hill of Samaria and wanted to get the people’s land away from them.

Ahab was like Solomon also because he married foreign wives and a good deal of his wickedness came through them. The chief wife of Ahab was Jezebel, from the city of Sidon on the sea coast. She had always worshiped the Baal,¹ so Ahab built a Baal temple for her in Samaria just as Solomon

¹ Baal means “lords.”

had built temples for the gods of his wives. But Jezebel was not satisfied with this; she wanted everybody to stop worshiping Yahweh and worship her god Baal. She even went so far as to kill some of the prophets of Yahweh.

The great champion of Yahweh in the time of Ahab was Elijah, the prophet. He was a man of the desert; he wore an animal's skin for a garment and tied it on with a leather girdle (*II Kings* 1:8). He kept away from Jezebel's court and stirred up the people to be true to their own Yahweh. When Jezebel heard of this, and heard that he had caused some of the prophets of Baal to be killed, she sent word to Elijah, saying,

As surely as you are Elijah and I am Jezebel, may the gods do to me what they will, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time. (*I Kings* 19:2)

Because of this threat and because almost everybody in Israel had become slaves of Jezebel, Elijah traveled off to the desert to seek Yahweh at his Holy Mountain. An old story says that as he journeyed south to the desert he was so discouraged that he cried, "It is enough; now, O Yahweh, take my life."

At last he came to the mountain and lodged in a cave and prayed to his God. The old story tells about the meeting between Elijah and Yahweh thus:

Yahweh passed by, and a great and violent wind rent

the mountain and broke in pieces the rocks before Yahweh; but Yahweh was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake; but Yahweh was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire; but Yahweh was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a still, small voice.

And as soon as Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And then there came a voice to him and said, What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for Yahweh, the God of hosts, for the Israelites have forsaken thee, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword, and I only am left, and they seek to take my life away. (*I Kings 19:11-14*)

Here in the mountains the heart of Elijah was so strengthened that he knew that he was not the only one faithful to their national God, and after a while he wanted to go back and stand against Jezebel and for Yahweh in Israel.

When he got back to Israel again, Elijah found that Naboth, the owner of a vineyard, had been stoned to death to get his land for the king. This did not seem much like the freedom for which Israel revolted against Rehoboam. Here is the old story probably just as the old story tellers used to tell it.

The Story of Naboth's Vineyard

Now Naboth the Jezreelite, had a vineyard beside the palace of Ahab, king of Samaria. And Ahab spoke to

Naboth, saying, Give me your vineyard that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near to my house, and I will give you a better vineyard for it; or, if it is more satisfactory to you, I will give you the value of it in money. But Naboth answered Ahab, Yahweh forbid me, that I should give to you the inheritance of my fathers. Ahab came into his house in ill humor and lay down on his bed and covered his face and would eat no food.

Then Jezebel his wife said to him, Is it you who now holds sway in Israel? Arise, eat, and let your heart be cheerful. I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite. So she wrote letters in Ahab's name and sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters to the elders and to the nobles who were in his city who presided with Naboth. And she wrote in the letters, Proclaim a fast and also place Naboth in a prominent place among the people. Then place two base men before him and let them bear witness against him, saying, You have cursed God and the King. And then carry him out and stone him to death.

And the men of his city, the elders and the nobles who presided in his city, did as Jezebel had ordered them; they carried him out of the city and stoned him to death with stones.

And they sent to Jezebel, saying, Naboth has been stoned and is dead. And Jezebel said to Ahab, Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money; for Naboth is not alive but dead. And as soon as Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.

But the word of Yahweh came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Arise, go down to meet Ahab the King of Israel, who dwells in Samaria; he is just now in the vineyard

of Naboth, whither he has gone down to take possession of it. And thou shalt speak to him, saying, Thus saith Yahweh, Hast thou killed and also taken possession? Moreover thou shalt speak to him, saying, Thus saith Yahweh, In the place where the dogs licked the blood of Naboth will the dogs lick thy blood also. And of Jezebel also Yahweh has spoken, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel in the district of Jezreel. (Read *I Kings* 21)

Injustice is the upsetter of many king's thrones; injustice furnishes fire for revolution. The throne of Ahab and Jezebel began to totter as soon as they began to be unjust to their people. Elijah the prophet was the man who dared speak against this injustice and prepare the way for revolt. Elijah could only begin it but his successor, Elisha, carried out his work. Ahab lived and carried on war against Moab and against the king of Syria about the city of Ramoth in Gilead. There he died in battle. But the punishment for his sins came upon his sons, and Jezebel lived long enough to receive her own punishment, as the rest of the story tells.

The revolutionist this time was a young man named Jehu. The prophets anointed him and his own men proclaimed him King. Then he set out to wipe out the house of Omri and Ahab. Listen to the story teller's account of how he came to Jezreel and killed Jezebel:

Now the watchman was standing on the tower of Jezreel, when he saw the cloud of dust about Jehu, as he

came, and said, I see a cloud of dust. And Joram (King of Israel, son of Ahab) said, Take a horseman and send him to meet them that he may inquire whether all is well? So one went on horseback to meet him and said, Thus saith the king, Is all well? And Jehu replied, What have you to do with welfare? Turn about and follow me. So the watchman reported, The messenger came to them but comes not back. Then he sent out a second horseman who came to them and said, Thus saith the king, Is all well? And Jehu answered, What have you to do with welfare? Turn about and follow me. So the watchman reported, He also came to them but comes not back; however, the driving is like the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi, for he is wont to drive furiously.

Then Joram said, Make ready. And as soon as they had made ready his chariot, Joram, king of Israel, set out and went to meet Jehu and found him in the field of Naboth the Jezreelite. And when Joram saw Jehu, he said, Is all well, Jehu? And he answered, How can all be well, as long as the whoredoms of your mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many? Then Joram turned about to flee crying, Treachery, O Ahaziah!—but Jehu, being already armed, shot with his bow and struck Joram between his shoulders so that the arrow went through his heart and he sank down in his chariot.

Then Jehu said to Bidkar his captain, Take him up and cast him in the field of Naboth the Jezreelite; for I remember how that, when I and you rode together after Ahab his father, Yahweh pronounced this judgment upon him; Surely I saw yesterday the blood of Naboth and his sons saith Yahweh; and I will requite thee in this plot saith Yahweh. Now therefore take and cast him into this plot, according to the word of Yahweh.

Then Jehu came to Jezreel. And as soon as Jezebel heard of it, she painted her eyes, attired her head, and looked out at the window. And as Jehu came in at the gate, she said, Is all well, for Zimri, your master's murderer? But he looked up to the window and said, Who is on my side? Who? And two or three eunuchs looked at him. And he said, Throw her down. And they threw her down so that some of her blood was spattered on the wall and on the horses, and he trod her under foot. Then he went in and ate and drank. Thereupon he gave the command, See now to this cursed woman and bury her, for she is a king's daughter. But when they went to bury her, they found no more of her than the skull, the feet, and the hands. When, therefore, they came back and told him, he said, This is the word of Yahweh which he spoke by his servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, In the plot of Jezreel shall the dogs eat Jezebel's flesh, and the body of Jezebel shall be as dung on the face of the field in the plot of Jezreel, so that they cannot say, This is Jezebel.¹ (*II Kings* 9: 17-37)

This terrible story of the end of the house of Omri had one splendid effect upon Israel, it let everybody see how awful is wickedness and injustice. People had begun to think about this when Rehoboam tried to hold them as slaves, but now they felt still more strongly that it does not pay to treat anybody unfairly about his land or his work or anything else.

Jehu, who headed the revolution, seems to have

¹ Note what is said of his fast driving in *II Kings* 19: 20. To this day we say of a fast driver, "He drives like Jehu."

been a dashing young fellow who put through everything he attempted and was a zealous worshiper of Yahweh. He stamped out the worship of Baal which Jezebel had tried to put in place of Yahweh worship.

One of the helpers of Jehu was a man named Jehonadab, son of Rechab. Jehu said to him, "Is your heart in sincere sympathy with my heart, as mine is with yours?" And Jehonadab answered, "It is." Then Jehu said, "If it be, give me your hand."

After this friendly covenant they worked together against Baal worship. Now Jehonadab was a man who did not believe in cities. He would not live in a house but dwelt in a tent. He looked back to the desert as the finest days in Israel's history. He thought that before they built houses and planted vineyards they did not get drunk with wine and worship Baal. Just as Elijah went back to the Holy Mountain better to hear Yahweh's voice, so Jehonadab thought that the people of Israel ought to live simply, as they did in the desert, if they wanted to please Yahweh. Israel could not forget the desert and how Yahweh spoke to them there.

Would you like to see a picture of the dashing young soldier, Jehu? Unbelievable as it seems we have found one among the monuments of the people of the two rivers—the Assyrians. Their king, Shalmanezer, had engraved on a tablet a picture of Jehu, humbly kneeling down before him. Of course

it is not as clear a picture as a modern photographer would make but it gives us a general view that makes us feel much more acquainted with those days. The inscription around the picture tells us what presents Jehu brought to the king of Assyria.

“Tribute of Jehu, son of Omri: silver, gold, a bowl (?) of gold, a basin (?) of gold, cups of gold, bars of lead, scepters (?) for the hand of the king, and balsam wood I received from him.”

One can imagine that Jehu would not like to take this humble attitude to a king. Nor would he like being called the “Son of Omri” when he had destroyed the house of Omri. But the Assyrians did not know the difference, and Jehu had to learn to take a good many defeats in the later part of his life.

The Assyrians play a great part in the story of this heroic nation from this time on through many years. They are always looking for smaller nations to conquer. Indeed, we have seen in this chapter the beginning of wickedness that will keep Israel from becoming a great nation. No nation can be great that treats its people as Ahab treated Naboth. The ideal of freedom for the people was almost destroyed by Ahab and only partially restored by Jehu. Can Israel recover her true freedom, or will the wicked elements weaken her so that she will easily fall into the hands of her Assyrian enemies? The rest of the story of Israel must answer.

CHAPTER IX

NEW FORCES IN ISRAEL

Have you noticed that you have not yet heard about any books being written by the Hebrews? Stories and songs you have heard of which were taken from the "later writings of the Hebrews." But now we have come to the place where people began to write these story books. Of course one reason they did not write books before was that they had such good story tellers and everybody learned the stories from hearing them told. By the time boys and girls were twelve years old they probably knew word for word dozens of Israel's songs and stories which they had heard at feasts and at home.

We do not know whether the Jews wrote at first on a kind of rough paper made from papyrus that grew on the banks of the Nile, or on clay tablets, as the people of Assyria did, or on the skins of animals. Nor do we know exactly what alphabet they used. Probably their letters were made much like those on the Moabite Stone. It is likely that it was their songs that were written down first; then they were gathered up into books, but all such books have been lost. We know the names of some of these collections of songs, however. In the twenty-first chap-

ter of *Numbers* there is a short quotation from *The Book of the Wars of Jehovah*. Probably "The Song of the Well," which is quoted in the same chapter, was also from that book. In *Joshua* 10:12 is a short quotation from a poem which we are told in verse 13 is taken from *The Book of the Upright*. The same book is mentioned in *II Samuel* 1:18 as the source of David's beautiful lament for Saul. Probably it was a book about the heroes who had been upright and brave.

Not far from this time people also began to put together some story books. The names of these books are lost, but many of their stories have been saved. Modern scholars have named the oldest collection of these *The Judean Story Book*. This seems to have been written in the Judean kingdom. It began back at the creation of the world to tell stories of the Hebrews. It always called the Hebrew god "Yahweh."

The Ephraimite Story Book is a modern name for the next oldest story book. It was written in north Israel, which was often called Ephraim. It also began at the earliest times to tell the story of the Hebrew. It often used, instead of Yahweh, the name Elohim, which is the plural of El. Today we have a great many of the stories from these two ancient books because many years after they appeared somebody saved them by weaving them together into one book. Now the older stories have to be unraveled from the later ones because they are still woven together in our Bible. The stories

of the making of the world and of the coming of the flood which we have imagined ourselves to have heard from the story tellers at the feasts are from the oldest of these, *The Judean Story Book*. We can't help wishing that all of it had been saved.

This beginning of books came at a time when the kingdom of Israel was becoming prosperous. People now had time to think of something else than making their crops grow for their food. After the reign of King Jehu of Israel, the towns began to grow into cities, and when Jeroboam II had ascended the throne he ruled almost as large a territory as David had conquered. A short account of him says,

He restored the boundary-line of Israel from the entrance of Hamath to the sea of Arabah, according to the word of Yahweh, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was of Gath-hepher. (*II Kings* 14:25)

The "sea of Arabah" means the Dead Sea and Hamath is a pass in the mountains north of Damascus. Not that Jeroboam II actually ruled as king over all that large tract of land but he made the people pay him tribute, probably even little Judah. For over forty years this second Jeroboam reigned but we have no more information about him or the prophet Jonah connected with him. But we do have one little scrap from that age which shows that they had grown to have the idea of

private property. When some explorers were recently digging at the mound where the old city of Megiddo once was, they found a seal which comes from the time of Jeroboam II. It reads: "Belonging to Shema, servant of Jeroboam." We do not know who this Shema was, but we can imagine him using this very seal to stamp things with, so that no one else would take them.

More important still, we have a book which gives a vivid picture of the time—the oldest writing in the Bible we still have as a book, the *Prophecy of Amos*. If we could have visited Israel in the days of Jeroboam II we should have found, according to Amos, a very proud and prosperous people, living in cities surprisingly like ours. As a matter of fact, as we read we feel almost as though we were visiting Bethel in Israel because of this vivid account written by Amos, the shepherd.

Let us take a picture from this book. Suppose you are attending a feast at Bethel.

There stands the little temple in which is the golden calf which Jeroboam had set up; yonder are great rocks on the hillside, just in front of the temple. There stand the priests sacrificing the animals which the people are bringing, and then giving back part of the meat for the people to eat at the feast. All about are priests and singers and story tellers and women dancers. Many are drinking wine and becoming gayer and noisier.

Suddenly a deep voice rings out above the laughter; all look that way and see a man of the desert,

with his shepherd's crook, standing among the rocks.
This is what he is saying:

Yahweh roars from Zion
And utters his voice from Jerusalem;
The pastures of the shepherds mourn,
And the top of Carmel withers.

“Oh, he is a man from the south, he talks of Jerusalem; come let us hear what he has to say.”
The people gather around for a little entertainment.
Next he talks about Damascus.

Thus hath Yahweh said:
For three transgressions of Damascus,
Yea, for four, I will not revoke it;
Because they have threshed Gilead
With threshing instruments of iron.”

Of course Damascus had committed transgressions!
Everybody knew that they were always fighting
down in Gilead and had practically destroyed the
country. Everybody was ready to agree with the
speaker when he declared,

I will break the bar of Damascus.
The people of Syria shall go into captivity.

Truly, thought the people, this is an interesting
man from the desert; he wants to punish our ene-
mies; whom next will he doom to punishment?

Thus has Yahweh said:
For three transgressions of Gāza,

Yea, for four, I will not revoke it;
Because they carried into complete captivity.
A whole people,
To deliver them up to Edom.

(*Amos 1:6*)

Slavery Yahweh has always hated; because the Philistines had been so cruel as to sell one whole tribe to the people of Edom, they ought to be punished. Their great cities should perish.

Therefore I will send a fire on the wall of Gaza,
And it shall devour her palaces;
And I will turn my hand against Ekron.
And I will cut off the inhabitant from Ashdod,
And the sceptre-holder from Ashkelon,
And the remnant of the Philistines shall perish.

(*Amos 1:7*)

Next he told of Ammon who also had been cruel to Gilead; for this the Ammonites should go into exile. Moab, too, had done something that the desert people considered terrible—they “burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime.” Everybody thought it necessary to bury even his worst enemy, and to burn his body seemed a special kind of cruelty. Moab should be punished. By this time the speaker had won his hearers; certainly all their neighbors should be punished. Who would not like to have their enemies fall? On went the voice:

Thus has Yahweh said:
For three transgressions of Israel,

Yea, for four, I will not revoke it;
Because they sell the righteous for money,
And the needy for a pair of shoes.

And because garments taken in pledge they spread out
Beside every altar,
And the wine of such as have been fined they drink,
In the houses of their gods.

Who crush the head of the poor,
And the way of the humble they turn aside,
And a man and his judge deal according to agreement,
And so profane my holy name.

(*Amos 2: 6-8*)

Israel to be punished? Does he mean to say that Yahweh will actually punish the people of Israel because they sell the needy for a pair of shoes? But if the needy haven't any money, why shouldn't a man sell them into slavery or have them put in prison and use the money to buy shoes? Who cares for the poor?

So, many of the rich people who listened to the prophet must have thought. Some of them were wearing garments that they had taken from people who owed them debts; some of them had brought wine to the feast which they had got from a neighbor by having him fined for something. Many people had grown rich by crushing the poor, and by taking everything that they had so that they had no food and clothing.

Perhaps you are thinking, "But were there

no laws in those days and no judges to whom the poor people could go to have things made right?" Yes, there were judges who sat by the gates of the cities where everybody could come to them and tell his troubles, but this is what happened. If a rich man had taken something away from a poor man, he would hurry to the judge before the poor man could get there. Then he would say to the judge, "I want you to agree with me that when that poor man comes and tells you how I took his garment and his wine you will not listen to him at all. I want you to refuse to help him get them back." Then the rich man would give the judge a present and the judge liked the present so well that he would promise. So what could the poor man do? He was helpless and might die of hunger and cold. Every one knew that this was wrong, for it was not very different from Ahab's stealing of Naboth's vineyard, yet it surprised every one to have a prophet speak of this injustice and unkindness in Israel.

The prophet next reminded them of the times long ago, when Yahweh freed them from Egyptian slavery.

And yet it was I who brought you up from the land of
Egypt,
And led you in the wilderness forty years,
And brought you hither to possess the land of the Amor-
ites.
And it was I who destroyed from before them the Amor-
ite,

Whose height was like that of the cedars, and he was
strong as the oaks;
But I destroyed his fruit from above and his roots from
beneath.

(*Amos* 2: 9, 10)

Because Israel has not been true to the freedom
which Yahweh gave to her, but her people now rob
each other, she must be destroyed down to her very
roots. In that terrible day of punishment no one
will be able to escape.

Then shall refuge fail the swift,
And the strong shall not strengthen his force,
And the warrior shall not deliver himself
And he that handles the bow shall not stand.

And the swift of foot shall not rescue himself,
And the stoutest of heart among the warriors;
And the skilled shall not deliver himself,
And he that rideth a horse shall not flee away in that day.
(*Amos* 2: 13-16)

No matter how fast you can run or what strong
weapons you have, you cannot get away from the
punishment for your unkindness.

But what is the power that is going to bring this
punishment upon Israel? It is Assyria, the king-
dom by the two rivers. Its king had come over and
made Jehu get on his knees before him, and again
Assyria would come. Would Israel be able to stand
up against them? No, because they were learning
to rob and hate each other. Yahweh would not
care to save such an unrighteous nation.

Now at last has come the kind of man who can make the Hebrew people truly a great nation! He can show them that however rich they are, they can not be a great nation, until they are righteous.

Who is this prophet with a new message for Israel? Perhaps some of the people went home from Bethel wondering where he came from. In the next chapter we must make his acquaintance, in his own home.

CHAPTER X

AMOS, THE SHEPHERD

“Amos, who was among the herdmen of Tekoa” (*Amos* 1:1) was a desert man whose voice startled the feasters at Bethel. He lived to the south of Jerusalem on a hill which looked down a deep valley to the Dead Sea. All about him, whichever way he looked, were barren rolling hills. He had to travel over those hills with his sheep in order to find food enough for them.

“A shepherd am I, and a dresser of sycamores,” Amos once said of himself. This indicates that Amos was often down in the valleys where the trees grow. Perhaps he looked after the sycamore fruit while his sheep grazed. Amos was an out-door man. Here are some of the words he uses about Yahweh and the stars and night:

His name is Yahweh,
He is the creator of the Pleiades and Orion;
He turns the murk into morning,
And day into night darkens;
He calls for the waters of the sea,
And pours them out on the face of the earth.
(*Amos* 5: 8)

These words show us that Amos often watched the day turn into night and the stars come out. Also he

probably often started off with his sheep so early in the morning that he saw the night turn into day. And he thought as he looked up at the stars or saw the sun rise over the hill-tops, "Yahweh creates this light." And as he saw a storm gather in black clouds over the Mediterranean sea and come and pour itself out on the hills he thought, "Yahweh gathers up that water from the sea and pours it out as a blessing upon the land." At another time Amos said:

For, lo! he forms the mountains and creates the wind,
And he tells man what is his thought;
He makes dawn darkness,
And treads upon the heights of the earth.

(*Amos 4: 13*)

To Amos, Yahweh not only created the mountains long ago but he is here now, sometimes stepping from hill-top to hill-top as he travels. He is here, though we cannot see him, just as the wind is—he "creates the wind." But more exciting than this, Yahweh speaks to man in his heart; "He tells man what is his thought." So you see Amos had much to think about besides his sheep and his sycamore fruit as he went around about the barren hill of Tekoa. He heard the voice of Yahweh; he says,

Yahweh took me from behind the sheep
And Yahweh said unto me:
Go, prophesy unto my people, Israel.

(*Amos 7: 15*)

Perhaps you think it was not strange for Yahweh to speak to Amos because you know that Amos was one of the prophets, but listen to what he says, "I am no prophet, nor am I a prophet's son." (*Amos* 7:15)

This means that Amos did not tell people where to find lost articles as some did who were called prophets; that is, he did not earn his living that way. He was a plain shepherd who felt that God spoke to him and gave him a message to the people.

Why did he go to Bethel to give his message? Probably he went up there sometimes to sell his wool and he was shocked at what he saw at the Bethel high-place, especially shocked at the way the rich treated the poor. Indeed, it seemed to him so terrible that he thought that Yahweh would certainly destroy Israel by the coming of the Assyrians.

Amos used the language of his desert when he went to warn the people about Assyria: "Can two walk together except they have made an appointment?" (*Amos* 3:3)

Down in the desert there were no roads, only rough paths, and Amos doubtless went right over the hills without trying to follow a road. Naturally you would not be likely to meet any one unless you made an appointment. Perhaps you will remember that Samuel said to Saul that three men would meet him at the oak of Tabor. But unless you agreed to meet at a tree or some such landmark, you might travel all day without meeting any one you knew. Now, says Amos, you are sinful and your punish-

ment is coming; these two things could not have met if Yahweh had not appointed them. He makes the same point in another way. Assyria he thinks of as a lion roaring as he had often heard them in the desert. When he heard that sound he knew that some little animal was being killed by a lion.

Does a lion roar in the jungle when there is no prey for him?

Does a bird fall upon the ground if there is no bait set for it?

Does a trap fly up from the ground unless it is catching something?

(*Amos 3: 4, 5*)

It seems that people in the land of Amos caught birds in traps. In the same way Amos means you can tell by the coming of the great Assyrian power westward that it will catch Israel in a trap and will crush it as an animal does its prey.

The lion hath roared; who is there that does not fear?

The Lord Yahweh has spoken; who is it that cannot prophesy?

(*Amos 3: 8*)

Amos does not try to save the feelings of his rich hearers. He tells them that there will not be any more of them left when Assyria has attacked them than he has sometimes seen left of a sheep which had been attacked by a lion. Amos heard the noise in the sheepfold perhaps in the night and he ran to

rescue the sheep but what did he find? Only two legs and a bit of an ear!

Thus has Yahweh said: As the shepherd rescues
From the mouth of the lion, two legs or a piece of an ear,
So the children of Israel shall be rescued, they who dwell
in Samaria,

In the corner of a couch, in the damask of a divan.

(*Amos 3: 12*)

You can be sure that the people who sat curled upon
beautiful couches did not like to hear Amos preach.
Some of them were rich enough to have one house
for the winter and another for the summer. Some
had white marble houses which they called ivory.
But Amos shouted to them,

And I will smite the winter house together with the summer house,

And the houses of ivory shall perish.

(*Amos 3: 15*)

Amos had no pity on the women of Israel; he called them cows! He said that they ill-treated the poor and asked their husbands for wine.

Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan,
Who dwell in the mountain of Samaria,
Who injure the poor, and crush the needy,
Who say to your husbands, Bring that we may drink.

(*Amos 4: 1*)

Then he said that they would be led forth out of the city with fish hooks in their noses. Not a pleasant picture for elegant ladies!

One thing that you would often have heard people talking about if you had walked about the streets of Bethel or Samaria in those days was "The Day of Yahweh" that wonderful day when all one's wishes would come true. Jeroboam II had been so successful and so many people had become rich that they thought, surely the day of Yahweh is almost here. What a bright day it will be! But this is what Amos said:

Alas for those who long for the day of Yahweh;
It is darkness and not light.

As when one flees from a lion, and a bear meets him;
Or goes into the house, and leans his hand upon the wall,
and a serpent bites him.

Shall not Yahweh's day be darkness and not light?
Yea, deep darkness without any brightness in it.

(*Amos* 5: 18-20)

All this because of the unkindness of the rich to the poor.

One reason that it was hard to make these people see their faults was that they thought themselves so religious. But Amos said that Yahweh was displeased with their religious feasts because they were unjust to each other even there. If a man cheated his neighbor it did not make him right with God to go to a religious feast.

I hate, I despise your feasts,
And I will not smell the savor of your festivals,
For, although ye offer me your burnt offerings and meal-offerings, I will not accept them.

Take away from me the noise of thy songs and the melody
of thy lyres;

And let justice roll as waters,

And righteousness as an everflowing stream.

(*Amos 5: 21-24*)

Notice that word justice; it is the great word of Amos. He made justice a part of the Yahweh religion; he added that thought to their understanding of what God requires of his people.

But, alas, the people of Israel, the northern kingdom, were not ready to accept his teaching and Yahweh's commands. So they must perish. Amos was so sure that Israel would not reform and therefore would surely cease to be a nation that one day he sang her funeral song:

Hear this word

Which I take up against you,

Even a dirge, O house of Israel;

For thus has said the Lord Yahweh:

She shall fall not to rise again,

The virgin Israel;

She shall be hurled down upon her own soil,

With none to raise her up.

(*Amos 5: 1, 2*)

Sometimes Amos offered a little hope, telling them that Yahweh cried to them, "Seek me and live." But he saw so little sign of repentance that he generally speaks as if Israel were doomed.

Finally the day came when the priest at Bethel

decided that this shepherd's words must be stopped. So he sent a messenger to the king, probably over in his palace in Samaria, telling him that Amos had said that Israel would go into captivity and the king die by the sword. Then Amaziah, the priest, went to Amos, probably going out in all his splendid priestly robes of authority to where Amos was preaching and he said to him,

O thou seer! Go, flee thee to the land of Judah;
And eat there, and prophesy there.
But at Bethel thou shalt no longer prophesy;
For it is the king's sanctuary,
And it is the royal residence.

And Amos answered, and said to Amaziah;
I am no prophet, nor am I a prophet's son;
But a shepherd am I, and a dresser of sycamores;
And Yahweh took me from behind the sheep,
And Yahweh said unto me:
Go, prophesy against my people, Israel.

(*Amos 7: 12-15*)

Here is one of the great scenes of the world, a man standing up against a priest, a man not even claiming to be a prophet but having something important to say. By this speech Amos became the first of the great prophets of Israel, the first of a new kind of prophet in the world's history.

Amos was forced to leave Bethel but when he got back to Tekoa, his message was still burning within him so hotly that he wrote it in a book. We have this book today, probably not very different from

the way he wrote it. It is the oldest book in our Bible. • We have seen that there are older songs and stories but there is no older book that has been kept together.

The world cannot be thankful enough for the idea of justice as set forth by Amos. Out of it has grown all that we mean by democracy,—a fair chance for everybody and every soul valuable to God. All great nations today try to come up to the standard of justice set forth by Amos. Is it not wonderful that a shepherd should thus help the world forward?

CHAPTER XI

HOSEA AND ISRAEL'S DOOM

When Amos told the people of Israel that they would be carried away into captivity they laughed at him. Were they not rich and prosperous? Look at their splendid palaces! Was not Jeroboam II a powerful king who could defend them?

But Amos knew what he was talking about; he knew that those palaces were full of wicked people and he knew that a new and terrible king had come to the throne in Assyria. His name was Tiglath-pileser. In his writings he loved to boast, "I destroyed, devastated, burned with fire." He also had a new plan for destroying countries; he carried their people into captivity. Far away from their homes they were taken and put among the king's subjects. What could they do, then, except to work for the king to earn their bread? But the Israelites thought he surely would not carry them off, for they were splendid people!

But trouble soon came in the following way. When Jeroboam II died, his son Zechariah ascended the throne, and then troubles began. It was wickedness in the palaces that caused the trouble first. One man, jealous of Zechariah, killed him and took the throne. Thus was ended the line of kings

which Jeroboam I had founded to free the people from slavery. There were no more real kings of Israel, only adventurers stooping even to murder to reach the throne.

This was the state of things when Tiglath-pileser came marching west. Now the people no longer laughed, they trembled with fear. But for the moment they escaped, for the murderer on Israel's throne took money and costly gifts and bribed the king of Assyria. This time the king was willing to be bought off, and he marched away with his gold.

In these dark days there spoke another prophet in Israel, Hosea, a man who lived among them. He cried out to them,

Hear the word of Yahweh,
O children of Israel;
Yahweh has a contention
With the inhabitants of the land;
For there is no truth, nor love,
Nor knowledge of God in the land.

(*Hosea 4: 1*)

What did Hosea mean by saying that there was "no truth" in the land? He meant that people did not speak the truth to each other. Where there is "no truth" there is sure to be "no love." This is the kind of dreadful place that Israel became in those days. Hosea said that he could find nothing but "swearing and lying and killing and stealing." Of course such people could not have any "knowledge of God" for God hates such things. And so Hosea

said, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." (*Hos.* 4:6)

You will remember from the sermons of Amos that the wicked people of Israel tried to be very religious. They still went to the altar at Bethel and worshiped before the golden calf which Jeroboam I had set up. They offered many sacrifices and talked much about their love to Yahweh, but Hosea saw that it all meant nothing while they were so wicked. Like Amos he spoke to them as if he were Yahweh:

What can I make of you, O Ephraim?
 What can I make of you, O Israel?
 Since your love is like a morning-cloud,
 Yea, like the dew which early goes away.

Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets,
 I have slain them by the words of my mouth,
 And my judgment is like the light which goeth forth.

For it is love that I delight in, and not sacrifice;
 Yea, knowledge of God, and not burnt offerings.
(*Hos.* 6: 4-6)

Hosea was a father of three children, two boys and a girl. He gave strange names to his children because he was so full of sorrow about Israel. Of his first son he said:

Call his name Jezreel;
 For yet a little while,
 And I will avenge the blood of Jezreel
 Upon the house of Jehu

And will cause the kingdom of the house of Israel to cease.
And it shall come to pass in that day,
That I will break the bow of Israel,
In the valley of Jezreel.

(*Hos. 1: 4, 5*)

You will remember that Jezreel was the place where Jehu overthrew the wicked house of Ahab. But since then the house of Jehu had become just as wicked as Ahab's and must be overthrown too. When a daughter was born to Hosea he said:

Call her name No-pity; (Lo-ruhamah)
For I will no longer
Have pity for the house of Israel
That I should at all forgive them.

(*Hos. 1: 6*)

Another son Hosea called Not-my-people (Lo-ammi). We do not know whether he actually called his children by these names all the time or not, but they must have known anyway that their father was often full of sorrow. One reason that he was so sad was that their mother often went off and left them alone. He had to be both father and mother to his children. It nearly broke Hosea's heart to think that a mother would go off and leave her own children and husband. And what she had done seemed exactly what Israel had done; she had left Yahweh who loved her. So Hosea put his two sorrows together, his sorrow over Israel and his sorrow over his wife. He represents Yahweh as saying,

When Israel was a child, then I loved him
And called my son out of Egypt.
The more the prophets called them,
The more they went away from them.
They sacrificed unto the Baalim,
And burned incense to graven images.

(*Hos.* 11: 1)

Just as he had tried and tried to call the mother back to her home, so Yahweh had tried to call Israel back to him, but she went off to the Baalim at the high-places. Just as Hosea had to teach his children to walk and had often healed their sorrows and their sickness, so Yahweh had shown his care to Israel, or Ephraim, as he sometimes calls Israel.

Yet I taught Ephraim to walk,
I took them on my arms,
But they knew not that I healed them.

(*Hos.* 11: 3)

How many times Hosea had taken his children up in his arms to comfort them! How well he remembered the days when he taught them how to take their first steps! Now he saw that Yahweh had been a tender father to Israel in the same way, leading them out of Egypt and teaching them how to walk as a nation. Yet Israel was untrue to Yahweh.

Now, this is the first time that any one had thought of Yahweh as a father! As a leader and judge and king they have learned to think of him since the days

that they wandered in the desert. But Hosea now comes forward with the most beautiful idea of all—Yahweh is a loving father!

Today almost every boy and girl thinks of God as a great Father. As they walk along with their hands in their earthly father's hand, they can look around at the sky and trees and think of the great Father who loves us all. But these children of Israel did not know for a long time that they were being led, or that they could call God, Father. It was Hosea, who had to take care of his children himself in place of their mother, who first told the children of Israel that God was taking hold of their hands just like a father.

One other beautiful thing Hosea did which we must not forget—he said that Yahweh would try to bring Israel back to himself sometime in the future. You will remember that Amos said that the Israelites would be wiped off the face of the earth because of their wickedness. Hosea, too, thought they would be terribly punished, but he loved them so much that he told them that Yahweh said,

I will heal their backsliding,
I will love them freely,
For mine anger is turned away.

(*Hos.* 14: 4)

In Eastern lands all people love the dew because it makes things grow where there is no rain. Around Mount Lebanon, in the land of Israel, there was always a heavy dew that kept things growing and

green all the year. The dew all over the grass and trees seemed like the kindness of God to all people. So Hosea said of Yahweh,

I will be as the dew to Israel:
 He shall blossom as the lily
 And cast forth his roots as Lebanon.
 His branches shall spread,
 And his beauty shall be as the olive tree,
 And his fragrance as Lebanon.

(*Hos.* 14: 5-7)

But, alas, first must come the punishment. One of the murderers who occupied Israel's throne was named Pekah. He brought the nation's punishment nearer by his deeds. He made war against Judah, and by this act brought back again that terrible king, Tiglath-pileser. But before finishing the story of Israel we must look over into Judah and see what they are thinking and how they affect Israel, for it is Judah's king that invites back Israel's final conqueror, Tiglath-pileser.

Israel was the more important kingdom ever since the separation from Judah. Her people had a chance to become a great nation. Why did they fail? Because they did not keep to their ideals. They broke away from Solomon because he was an oppressor of the people, but it was not long before the kings of Israel became oppressors too. The rich also oppressed the poor. Israel did not take advantage of her chance.

No nation is great where either a king or a class

is unjust to the rest of the people. Amos and Hosea tried to save the people from destruction because of their injustice, but could not. They blindly rushed on to their doom.

CHAPTER XII

ISAIAH AND JUDAH

At first the kingdom of Judah was poor and full of trouble. In the days after the rebellion of Jero-boam I, the glory of Solomon's reign faded quickly. The kings of his family who came after him did little to help Judah to become great.

Asa reigned a long time and, on the whole, well. But he did one thing that brought much trouble,—he asked the king of Damascus to help him fight against Israel. Damascus is a splendid old city far up north at the foot of a mountain. Down the mountain side rushes a beautiful river whose waters, spreading abroad, fertilize a luxuriant plain in which the city stands. Around the plain are deserts, mountains, and marshy lakes. This means that the king of Damascus has always felt himself to be rich and powerful.

What do you suppose he thought when Asa, the king of the poor little country of Judah, asked him to come down and help him fight his brother Israel? Perhaps he said to himself, Ah, this is my chance. Now I can get some of the land of these little nations! So he brought his soldiers and attacked Israel from the north, while Asa attacked her from the south. The plan was successful, and the king of

Damascus added many of the villages of Israel to his kingdom. After this there was much fighting between these three kingdoms. This kept Judah poor and small and unimportant.

When Uzziah was king, Judah became more prosperous. Then a young prophet arose who made Judah important—the young man Isaiah. One day as this young man was going up to the temple in Jerusalem it seemed as if Yahweh was there with his angels. The whole temple seemed full of Yahweh's glory and a great voice rang out, saying,

Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh of Hosts,
The whole earth is full of his glory.

This made the young man, Isaiah, bow down in terror and say,

Woe is me! for I am undone;
Because I am a man of unclean lips,
And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.

As Isaiah was bowed down in sorrow for his sins and those of his people it seemed as if one of the angels touched his lips and said,

Lo! this has touched thy lips;
Thy iniquity is gone
And thy sin forgiven.

This made Isaiah look up with brightness in his face to think that his sins were forgiven and that Yahweh would not call him wicked. Then there

seemed to ring out a great voice filling the whole temple:

Whom shall I send
And who will go for us?

Then the young man, Isaiah, stood up straight and with all his might answered the great voice of Yahweh saying,

Here am I; send me.

The voice then cried,

Go!

(*Isa.* 6: 3-9)

Isaiah knew, then, that he must go out into the streets of Jerusalem and talk to the people about their sins. He must make Jerusalem holy because Yahweh is holy. To be holy means to be clean and pure and good at heart. You cannot be unkind to any one if you are holy.

Now one of the sins of Judah was that her rich people were unkind to her poor. This, then, was one of the things that the young Isaiah said as he went out to speak to the people:

The spoil of the poor is in your houses:
What mean ye that ye crush my people,
And grind the face of the poor?
Saith Yahweh, Yahweh of hosts.

(*Isa.* 3: 14, 15)

You may be sure that the rich people would not like to be told that the beautiful rugs and garments they

had in their houses were made by the labor of the poor and that the rich had no right to them. They would not like to be told that they were the ones who crushed the poor, not giving them food and clothes enough to keep them well and happy. You may be sure also that the rich did not make it very pleasant for the young man Isaiah. But did he stop on that account? Not at all. He kept finding new ways to bring his message to the people. We shall see how he did this in the little drama which follows:

ISAIAH, THE MINSTREL PROPHET

A Scene from the Life of Isaiah

Imagine yourselves in the street of an eastern city. Let two or three take up their stand at the side of the street to sell their wares, scarfs, jewelry, brass dishes, etc. As people begin to come along the street the pedlars shout out their wares.

1ST PEDLAR: Dishes for your curds, O women of Judah, fine dishes for your cheese. *(Two women examine them.)*

2ND PEDLAR: Scarfs of scarlet worthy of the head of a sheik. *(There is a buzz of conversation as the people talk over the bargains. In the midst of the hubbub ISAIAH appears with harp in hand.)*

A MAN: See, here comes a singer; let us hear him.

(ISAIAH steps up on a seat between the pedlars and the people gather round him.)

ISAIAH:

A song will I sing of my friend,
A love song touching his vineyard.

A WOMAN: Ah, a song of love.

ISAIAH:

A vineyard belongs to my friend,

On a hill that is fruitful and sunny;
 He digged it and cleared it of stones,
 And planted there vines that are choice;
 A tower he built in the midst,
 And hewed also therein a wine vat;
 A MAN: Truly a beautiful vineyard.

ISAIAH:

And he looked to find grapes that are good;
 Alas, it bore grapes that are wild.

Ye, in Jerusalem dwelling,
 And ye who are freemen of Judah,
 Judge ye; I pray, between me
 And my cherished vineyard.
 What could have been done for my vineyard
 That I had not done?

CROWD: (*to one another*) What, indeed?

ISAIAH:

When I looked to find grapes that are good,
 Why bore it grapes that are wild?

CROWD: Why wild grapes?

ISAIAH:

And now let me give you to know
 What I purpose to do to my vineyard:
 I will take away its hedge,
 That it be eaten up,
 I will break through its walls,
 That it be trodden down;
 Yea, I will make it a waste,
 Neither pruned nor weeded.

CROWD: Truly a bad vineyard; he should destroy it.

ISAIAH:

It shall shoot up in thorns and briers,
 And the clouds will I enjoin that they rain not upon it.
 A MAN: (*to ISAIAH*) An unworthy vineyard; destroy it.
 (*The crowd nod agreement.*)

ISAIAH:

For the vineyard of Yahweh Sabaoth

Is the house of Israel,

(Great consternation in the crowd)

And the men of Judah his cherished plantation.

And he looked for justice, but behold! bloodshed;

For righteousness, but behold! an outcry.

A MAN: Come, hear him no longer. A false prophet!

(As the crowd withdraws, shaking their fists at Isaiah, he calls after them—)

ISAIAH:

Woe unto them that join house to house

Who lay field to field till there be no room.

Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning,

That they may follow strong drink.

Woe unto them that justify the wicked for a reward;

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil.

(to one young man who stayed with him)

Come, let us walk in the light of Yahweh.

(ISAIAH walks out with his arm around the shoulders of the young man.)

CHAPTER XIII

THE TRAGIC CHOICE MADE BY A KING

Ahaz was a young man of twenty years when he came to the throne of Judah. He determined to be bolder than the kings before him in worshipping all gods. He "made his son to pass through the fire according to the abominations of the heathen"; (*II Kings* 16:3) that is, he burned his son as a sacrifice to some god. He tried thus to be popular with all the people, but did not care whether he did right. He did not make friends with the young prophet Isaiah, who could not approve of his deeds.

In a few years he found himself in trouble. The king of Damascus, Rezin, and Pekah, the assassin who called himself king of Israel, joined together in an alliance to fight Assyria, for it was now certain that this great power was coming west. They wanted Ahaz to join with them but he did not consent. So they marched their armies right down to Jerusalem and prepared to attack the city, and Ahaz and the people were frightened. Isaiah tells us of Ahaz that, "his heart and the heart of the people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind." (*Isa.* 7:2)

Now Jerusalem, you remember, had only one spring which was outside the city walls. The king

was afraid that the armies might take this spring, so he went out to see how to keep the water for the city. As he was looking at the spring Isaiah came before him, leading a little boy by the hand. And he said to the king,

Take heed and be quiet;
Fear not, neither let thine heart be faint
Because of these two tails of smoking firebrands.
(*Isa. 7: 4*)

Isaiah knew that the only power to be afraid of was great Assyria, and that both Israel and the king of Damascus would probably fall before Assyria and become only two "smoking firebrands." He wanted Ahaz not to fight and not to pay money to any of them. He wanted him to trust in Yahweh and keep out of political alliances. He told the king to ask a sign to make sure that this would be safe. But the king said, "I will not ask, neither will I tempt Yahweh." (*Isa. 7:12*) Then Isaiah told him that a little child should come into the world who would be named Immanuel, *God-with-us*. And before this child should be old enough "to refuse evil and choose the good" those two kings camped outside Jerusalem should see their own countries unpeopled by Assyria. (*Isa. 7:14-16*) Why, then, be afraid of them?

But Ahaz thought he could outwit the kings who were besieging Jerusalem. So he sent secret messengers to the king of Assyria to tell him that these

kings were plotting against Judah, and asked him to attack them. He thought that would cause them to hurry home to save their own cities, and the Assyrian king would then count him as one of his friends.

This was the tragic choice of Ahaz. He refused to believe Isaiah's message from God, and turned for help to Judah's future persecutor and destroyer! He even wrote a letter to the king of Assyria saying:

"I am thy slave and thy son; save me from the king of Syria (Damascus) and the king of Israel, who are attacking me." (*II Kings* 16: 7) Thus Ahaz sold himself and Judah into slavery. He laid a burden upon the people from which they would never escape, which indeed led later to the long captivity of Judah in the land of the two great rivers. Isaiah seems to be the only one who saw plainly what would follow the king's choice. He made up his mind to try to keep the people from supporting the king. This is the story of how he made his appeal to the people:

One day Isaiah took with him two men and, carrying a great tablet in his arms, went into one of the busy parts of the city, perhaps the market-place of Jerusalem. People who were buying beautiful cloths or jewelry or pieces of pottery would be surprised to see this strange-looking tablet set up against one of the bazaars, and a young man writing on it. In the Eastern world nobody is ever in a

hurry, so you may be sure that they all left their bargaining and crowded around to see what he was writing. And this is what they saw:

M A H E R	(haste)
S H A L A L	(the booty)
H A S H	(speed)
B A Z	(the prey)

What could the man mean by writing such terrible words? Who does he think will come pouncing upon Judah like an animal upon its prey and carry her people off for booty? It was none other than the great power of Assyria that Ahaz the king was calling in to help him—a power able to destroy not only Damascus and Israel, but also Judah.

The words of the writing on the tablet Isaiah also gave as a name to his little new-born son. Imagine a little baby named Maher-shalal-hash-baz! His mother would have to shorten it if she wished to call him quickly! Isaiah had a special reason for giving this strange name to his boy. He wanted to be able to say to the people,

“Before the child shall have knowledge to cry My father, and, My mother, the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be carried away before the king of Assyria.” (*Isa. 8: 4*)

You know that “father” and “mother” are the first words that most children speak. Isaiah meant, then, that in a year or two, before his baby boy could learn to say his first words, Assyria would conquer

those two kingdoms that were now attacking Judah. He hoped that the people would believe him and no longer be afraid, but put their trust in Yahweh. But the people agreed with the king, so they laughed at Isaiah and probably called him a fool; and Isaiah had to tell them that some day they would see that they were the foolish ones. He said that his message from Yahweh was like the little stream of Shiloh that flowed near the city. They would pay no attention to him now, but some day Assyria would flow over them like a great river and punish them for their unbelief. But this is the splendid way that Isaiah said it:

Forasmuch as this people hath refused the waters of Shiloh
that go softly,
And faint before Rezin and Remaliah's son,
Now, therefore, Yahweh bringeth up upon them the waters
of the river, strong and many,
Even the king of Assyria and all his glory;
And it shall sweep onward into Judah;
It shall reach even to the neck;
And the stretching out of its wings shall fill the breadth
of thy land,
O Immanuel.

(*Isa. 8: 6-8*)

Thus did both king and people decide against Isaiah. They would not quietly wait to see what was the wise thing to do; they would not trust Yahweh to keep them if they did right.

Soon word came from the East that old Tiglath-

pileser was rising up like a lion from his den and starting west to see whom he might devour. The letter of Ahaz had asked him to attack Damascus and Israel. He expected to do that anyway, so of course he came. But now he said, "Perhaps I can get Judah also." All the people in Judah rejoiced, because now they could see the Israelites and the Syrians packing up their camps to go home and get ready to meet the great king. Ah, now they would be repaid for their impudence in daring to come down and attack Jerusalem!

Did any of Isaiah's disciples remind the people that this was exactly what Isaiah had said would happen? Did this make them remember what he had said about the danger that the great Assyrian river might flow over into Judah? Did they begin to think that perhaps Tiglath-pileser might attack Jerusalem?

Perhaps it was this fear that made Ahaz gather up all the gold and silver and fine things he could take from the temple and ask the people to give him more, and get ready to go to Damascus to meet the Assyrian king. If Ahaz could give him many presents, perhaps he would let Judah alone for a while. That is the way a weak, wicked man plans, just to save himself now from the results of his deeds. He knew he had done wrong and he made up his mind to escape the punishment if possible. The rest of the story will tell how he did save himself and left the punishment to come upon Judah later. This is why the choice of King Ahaz was tragic for Judah.

PROPHET MEETS KING

A Dramatic Scene

King and counsellors examining spring. Unseen, ISAIAH enters, leading his son, Shear Yashub. As the king turns and discovers ISAIAH, the boy bows, and ISAIAH speaks:

ISAIAH: Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither let thine heart be faint, because of these two tails of smoking fire-brands. Because Syria hath counselled evil against thee saying, Let us go up against Judah and vex it, and set up a king of our own. (*King shows anger.*) Thus saith Yahweh God, it shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass. (*King shows surprise.*) If ye will not believe surely ye shall not be established. (*King calls counsellor to him and they confer saying, Shall we not appeal to Assyria? etc.*) (ISAIAH watches them anxiously, then comes closer and speaks with great earnestness.) Ask thee a sign of Yahweh thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above.

AHAZ: (*loftily*) I will not ask, neither will I tempt Yahweh. ISAIAH: (*indignantly*) Hear ye now, O house of David; is it a small thing to weary men, that ye will weary my God also? Yahweh himself shall give you a sign. Behold a young woman shall bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel, God-with-us. For before the child is old enough to refuse the evil and choose the good, these two kings that now you fear shall be conquered by Assyria. But, alas, this great Assyria to whom thou wilt run for help will seek also to destroy Judah. The Assyrians will come like bees and settle upon the rocks and thorns of Judah. (AHAZ in anger summons his counsellors to depart with him. As they are leaving, ISAIAH continues) Take heed. If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.

(For a play covering the whole of Isaiah's life see *The Drama of Isaiah*, by E. W. Whitman. The Pilgrim Press, Boston.)

CHAPTER XIV

ISAIAH'S WONDERFUL KING

How proud and important King Ahaz felt to meet and talk with the great Assyrian! Do you not see him as he bows low and offers presents and then rises up proudly to make the emperor feel his importance? In the days following there would be great processions through the streets of Damascus to show the people that a magnificent emperor now ruled them. Ahaz would be given an important place in these processions.

One account shows us that Ahaz longed to have more of this grandeur in Judah. He saw a beautiful altar in Damascus that he wanted to copy for the temple at Jerusalem. Why should not Jerusalem be as fine as Damascus? Accordingly he got some one to make him a pattern of that altar and at once sent off a messenger to carry it to Urijah the priest. He wanted the altar made so that it would be ready for him to use when he came home, so that the people of Judah might then see the new splendor that he had brought to them.

During the processions and feasts in Damascus, Ahaz would make sure by his presents and promises that Tiglath-pileser would not give Judah any trouble at once; then he would travel back thinking

all along the way how he could be more like the great Assyrian.

The account of the home-coming of Ahaz, as given in our Bible, is very brief, but it says that the king used the new altar at once. Probably this means that he called the people together at the temple to tell them of the successful journey he had made, and the splendid reception the emperor had given him. Everybody would be glad and say to his neighbor, "Now we know that Isaiah was wrong and our king was right. See how fine we are and how safe with Assyria as our friend." But the foes of Isaiah were short sighted. Probably Tiglath-pileser said to himself as he took Ahaz's presents, "Aha! your presents show that you are rich but afraid of us. Your turn to be conquered will come soon."

But the people and the king did not think of this and rejoiced that they were safe for the present. Then the king stood before his new altar, probably clothed in fine new robes that he had brought back from Damascus, and he himself offered peace offerings. Usually it was the priest who stood at the altar, but probably Ahaz had seen Tiglath-pileser stand and offer thanks in this way and he wanted to do the same thing.

Another thing that Ahaz did in order to be like the emperor was to plan to have sun-worship on the roof of the temple. This was, of course, disloyalty to Yahweh and must have shocked the priests and many of the people. On that account there is not much said about it in the Bible. But we know that

there was an "upper chamber of Ahaz" on the roof of which were altars. (See *II Kings* 23:12)

What about Isaiah during the days when king and people were so joyous? He must have been filled with sorrow. He saw the "distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish" (*Isa.* 8:22) that would come out of their present doings.

But Isaiah also looked far ahead to a time when, after the darkness, should come brightness.

The people that walk in darkness
Shall see a great light;
On them that dwell in a gloomy land
A brightness shall burst.
Thou wilt cause abundant exultation;
Thou wilt create exceeding joy.¹
(*Isa.* 9:2, 3)

More important still, Isaiah dreamed of a great king. He thought of him first as a little child. How Isaiah must have loved children! Ahaz the king had proved himself unworthy of the throne of David. But the perfect child to be born will grow up to be a powerful king like the Assyrian monarch except that he will be just and righteous. Listen to Isaiah's words and see what kind of name he gives to this child:

For unto us a child is born,
Unto us a son is given,
And the government shall be upon his shoulder:

¹ The translation of these Isaiah passages is from H. C. Mitchell's *The Prophet Isaiah*, except one which is from *The Polychrome Bible*.

And his name shall be called,
Wondrous-counsellor, god of a warrior,
Father of booty, prince of peace.

Of the increase of his government
And of peace there shall be no end,
Upon the throne of David,
And upon his kingdom,
To establish it, and to uphold it
With judgment and with righteousness
From henceforth even forever.

(*Isa. 9: 6, 7*)

Far greater than Tiglath-pileser will this greater king of Judah be; he will take more booty; he will rule so completely that there will be peace. But best of all, no one will wish to revolt from his rule because he is such a wondrous counsellor to every one and he is so righteous in all his decisions.

This is the ideal of a fine, strong young man. Isaiah was not blind to the magnificence of the Assyrian monarch, but the king he could admire must be also righteous. And he believed such a king would come some day. This is one of the fine things about Isaiah; he would not give up his idea that right would prevail. Though king and people had refused to listen to him he still held to his idea, and believed that some day it would triumph.

Isaiah now had a considerable group of disciples (*Isa. 8:16*). Probably they were young men who, like himself, hoped for a greater king than Ahaz and a day of real triumph for Judah. Together this

little group of friends now retired from public affairs, and wrote and dreamed about the glorious future. How much this was worth to Judah and how far their hopes were fulfilled the rest of the story of Isaiah's life will set forth. Always it pays to stick to the right even though every one is against you. Sometime that right will triumph.

But what of those "two tails of smoking fire-brands"? Did they manage to escape their punishment, too, as Ahaz did? No, their day had come. Isaiah's words about them were fulfilled; they did Judah no harm and their smoky fire was put out.

"The king of Assyria went up against Damascus, and took it, and carried the people of it captive to Kir, and slew Rezin." (*II Kings* 16: 9)

The capital city of Israel was spared but the king was killed and replaced by a tool of the Assyrians, named Hoshea. We have an account by Tiglath-pileser himself on the walls of his palace, telling of his triumphant journey into Palestine. Another king tried to rub out the writing but enough is left to make it certain that Tiglath-pileser recorded that he made Rezin of Damascus flee from his city and that he overthrew Pekah of Israel.

Thus did the triumph of Assyria begin. For another ten years Israel kept her name and sat in her place, but her heart was gone. She was really dead and ready for her funeral. Her burial was ac-

complished by the successors of Tiglath-pileser.

Israel failed because she did not keep the ideals of freedom with which she began, because she wanted to be rich rather than right.

CHAPTER XV

MICAH, THE FARMER

The tragic decay of the northern kingdom, Israel, deeply affected all the prophets. But none of their words of warning saved her. On she rushed to her doom, and in the year 722 B. C. the end came. Tiglath-pileser had died and his successor Shalmanezar had come over and besieged Samaria, the capital of Israel, for three years. (*II Kings* 17: 3-6) Samaria could hold out so long because she was built on a hill which the enemy could not climb without being seen. But finally the Israelites had to give up and the new Assyrian emperor, Sargon, who had seized the throne when Shalmanezar died, entered in triumph. Here is his own account,—

“At the beginning of my reign, in my first year, . . . Samaria I besieged, I captured; 27,290 people from its midst I carried captive. 50 chariots I took there as an addition to my royal force . . . I returned and made more than formerly to dwell. People from lands which my hands had captured I settled in the midst. My officers over them as governors I appointed. Tribute and taxes I imposed upon them after the Assyrian manner.”¹

Think what this means: that fathers were dragged

¹ G. A. Barton's *Archeology and the Bible*, p. 369.

away from their families and marched for weeks and weeks across the desert to far-away Assyria and there forced to work like slaves. It was worse than death to them and to their families. It is possible that some whole families were taken, but, even so, they became slaves and were far away from the land they loved. Especially hard would it be for them to worship Yahweh their God in this far-away land where everybody worshiped Marduk, Ashur, and other gods.

Both the Assyrian and the Biblical accounts say that people from Assyria were brought over and settled in the land of Israel. (*II Kings* 17:24) They may have been brought like slaves or they may have been told that they would be given lands and houses free if they would go. Which do you think the emperor would be more likely to do? Of course he was so cruel and hard-hearted that he would not mind taking his own subjects over to Palestine whether they wanted to go or not, but you must remember that his purpose in taking settlers there was to have people in the land of Israel who would not revolt against him. Is it not likely, therefore, that he would make them think that he was doing them a great kindness when he took them over the long journey to Palestine? Perhaps he even proclaimed his offer and took those that wanted to go.

And what do you suppose these Assyrians would do when they reached Israel? You may be sure they would take the best of everything. If they saw

an Israelite living in a fine house with vineyards and fig-orchards around, they would tell him to move out at once and he would have to do it because it was the king of Assyria who now ruled Israel.

The newly-arrived Assyrians had some trouble with lions coming up from the desert and devouring their children. And they said to themselves, "This is because we do not know the god of this land." So they appealed to the emperor and he sent them a priest of Yahweh who came to Bethel and showed them how to worship Yahweh. After that they worshiped Yahweh along with their Assyrian gods. (*II Kings* 17:24-33)

The carrying off of Israel to Assyria is the story of the "Lost Ten Tribes of Israel." Many people believe that they were taken to one place in Assyria, or at least were kept together so that some day they may even yet be found. But you can see from the accounts that they were too completely lost for that. There must have been many more than 27,290 of all Israel. Probably only the best workers were taken and the emperor would see that they were not left together to make him trouble. Perhaps some of those left in Israel went down into Judah where they would have many friends. So the ten tribes of Israel were "lost" and have never been found, because they were mixed in with many other peoples. This is the very last that is known of the kingdom that young Jeroboam founded when he revolted from Solomon and a sad end it was.

One prophet who was deeply impressed by the

fall of the kingdom of Israel was Micah, a farmer living in the little town of Moresheth. Perhaps it was his thinking about Israel's sorrows that made him a prophet. He saw, like every one else, that Israel suffered for her sins. But as he looked at the city of Jerusalem, he saw there also many committing the sins of Israel. This so filled him with indignation that he came forth as a prophet, declaring,

¹ Zion shall be plowed as a field,
And Jerusalem shall become heaps,
And the mountain of the house
As the high places of a forest.

(*Mic.* 3: 12)

Nobody would like to hear that message. It sounded like treason. Jerusalem fall? Why? Micah, the farmer, replied in language much like that of Amos, the shepherd:

Lo, Yahweh goeth forth from his place;
He descendeth and marcheth on the heights of the earth.
Molten are the mountains beneath him,
And the valleys gape open,
Like wax in fire,
Like water poured over a fall.
For the transgression of Jacob is all this,
And for the sins of the house of Israel.
What is the transgression of Jacob?
Is it not Samaria?

¹ All the text of Micah in this chapter is from G. A. Smith's *Minor Prophets*.

What is the sin of the house of Judah?

Is it not Jerusalem?

Therefore do I turn Samaria into a ruin of the field.

Yea, it hath come unto Judah!

It hath smitten right up to the gate of my people,

Up to Jerusalem.

(*Mic.* 1: 2-6, 9)

Look at Israel, he says. Is not Jerusalem as bad as Samaria? If Yahweh allowed Israel to be carried away because of her sins, how can you expect to escape if you commit the same sins? The villages of Judah and the people of Jerusalem may expect the Assyrian to take them captive also.

Micah boldly pointed out the sins of Judah and it is interesting to see that he feels especially strong about the fact that the rich were taking the land of the poor. He pictures the rich as lying on their beds at night planning to deprive the poor of their homes, and as getting up at daylight to carry out their plans. Listen to his words:

Woe unto them that plan mischief,

And on their beds work out evil!

As soon as morning breaks they put it into execution.

For—it lies in the power of their hands!

They covet fields and seize them,

Houses, and lift them up,

So they crushed a good man and his house,

A man and his heritage.

(*Mic.* 2: 1, 2)

Had some of Micah's farmer friends had their land taken from them? Had some of Micah's own farm land been seized by some one so powerful that he could do nothing to get justice? He thinks that the poor themselves have not done anything to make the rich take their things. The poor have walked quietly along their way attending to their own business, but the rich have snatched the garments off their shoulders and carried away the women from their homes.

But ye are the foes of my people,
 Rising against those that are peaceful;
 The mantle ye strip from them that walk quietly by,
 Averse to war!
 Women of my people ye tear from their happy homes,
 From their children ye take my glory forever.
 Rise and begone—for this is no resting place!
 Because of the uncleanness that bringeth destruction,
 Destruction incurable.

(*Mic.* 2: 8-10)

So cruel did Micah feel many of the powerful people in Judah to be that he describes them as eating the flesh of the poor—as skinning them, breaking their bones, and chopping them up as if they were putting them into a kettle to boil. (*Mic.* 3: 2, 3)

No wonder that Micah was arrested and brought before the king as a traitor because he said Jerusalem should be plowed as a field. But there was a new king on the throne of Judah. Ahaz had died and his young son Hezekiah was king, and he knew

Isaiah. This made all the difference in the world in his treatment of Micah. Probably Isaiah showed Hezekiah that what Micah was saying about the rich and strong was true. So Hezekiah and the people of Judah did not put Micah to death, and perhaps the king did something to stop the land-grabbing and the robbery. (See *Jeremiah* 26: 18, 19)

Here the story of Micah ends, but his words no doubt had a great influence upon Hezekiah and the people of Judah. Under the leadership of Ahaz they had become as wicked and foolish as Israel. The words of Micah added to the influence of Isaiah began to make a new, reformed Judah that would not fall before the Assyrian for a hundred years.

Here, then, is a farmer who helps to save his country by declaring her sins boldly even in the face of possible death. It was the spirit within the man that turned the farmer into the prophet. Who, then, can be a prophet? A farmer, a shepherd, a man of the court,—*any one* who can hear the voice of God about the right and will tell others, may become a prophet of God.

It was the prophets who kept Judah from suffering at once the punishment from Assyria which Ahaz had prepared for her. During the hundred years of life left to Judah we shall see her become for a time a truly great nation, because her king and people listened to the voice of God as proclaimed by the prophets.

CHAPTER XVI

JERUSALEM DELIVERED

After Ahaz and the people rejected Isaiah's message, he and his disciples withdrew from the king's court. They did not cease their labors, however, but busied themselves writing the prophet's utterances in a little book. When Hezekiah became king, Isaiah once more appeared at court, and advised against joining with Egypt against Assyria.

Think what a bad state of affairs Ahaz had left to his son Hezekiah,—a great tribute of money and treasure to be paid every year to the king of Assyria. And all the while Egypt kept saying, "Why should you pay it? Join me; I will protect you from Assyria." Isaiah tried to help the young king. He told him to have nothing to do with Egypt because Egypt could never be trusted.

One day ambassadors arrived from the little country of Philistia. They told Hezekiah that they had decided to join with Egypt, and surely Judah could not refuse to join also. But Isaiah was there to urge Hezekiah to trust in Yahweh; and the king listened and sent the ambassadors home with a refusal. (*Isa.* 14:28-32)

This early picture of Hezekiah is a beautiful one—a strong young man realizing the mistakes his

father had made and determined to keep Judah free from more wrong-doing. Probably Isaiah became a kind of teacher to him, showing him how Judah could be a great nation holy to Yahweh. How can one doubt that he put before the young Hezekiah his picture of the ideal king? And Hezekiah, we may imagine, stood up straight and tall and made up his mind to be that ideal king.

But great excitement swept over all the little Palestine states when Sennacherib, the new Assyrian king, began marching west to punish Philistia and others for refusing to pay their tribute. And, alas, there were other counsellors than Isaiah pouring their advice into the ears of the young king. There was a man named Shebna who, though not a Judean, had managed to become treasurer. There were throngs of princes who continually told Hezekiah that his only hope of saving Judah was to join the alliance with Egypt. Isaiah stood up against them like a warrior, saying,

Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help,
And stay on horses and trust in chariots because they are
many,
And in horsemen because they are strong,
But they look not to the Holy One of Israel, neither seek
Yahweh.

(*Isa.* 31:1)

But Hezekiah yielded to his bad counsellors, and Isaiah, filled with indignation and sorrow, cried out to them,

Woe to the unruly sons! says Yahweh,
Carrying out a purpose which is not mine,
And concluding a treaty contrary to my spirit,
Thus adding sin to sin;
Who set forth on the way to Egypt without asking my
counsel.

(*Isa.* 30: 1, 2)

There must have been a dramatic scene in the court when Isaiah boldly told them that the covenant they had made with Egypt was a "covenant with death" which would lead to the overwhelming of Judah. (*Isa.* 28: 14-19)

On one occasion he also spoke words to Shebna that must have put his life in danger, for he told Shebna that Yahweh would hurl him out of Judah as a man throws a ball far across a field. (*Isa.* 22: 15-19)

So disappointed did Isaiah feel in king and people that he called Assyria the whip or rod with which it was necessary for Yahweh to punish Judah.

Woe! Assyria, the rod of mine anger,
And the staff of mine indignation!
Against an impious nation am I wont to send him,
And against the people of my wrath to give him a charge,
To take spoil and seize booty,
And to trample them like mire in the streets.

(*Isa.* 10: 5-6)

Nearer and nearer drew the Assyrian army and greater grew the excitement in the little states of Palestine. Down the coast the common enemy

moved, taking Sidon and other sea-coast places, then turning eastward toward Judah. How they treated the people they captured is shown by the account which Sennacherib has left us of what he did in Ekron. The king of Ekron had refused to join the Egyptian alliance and his own people had taken him from the throne and carried him to Jerusalem for Hezekiah to keep in prison. Sennacherib thus tells the story:

“The governors, princes, and people of Ekron, who had cast into fetters of iron Podi, their king . . . and had delivered him to Hezekiah, the Judean, who as an enemy imprisoned him . . . I approached Ekron. The governors and princes who had committed sin I killed and on stakes round the city I hung their bodies. I brought Podi, their king, out of the midst of Jerusalem, and on the throne of dominion over them I placed, and imposed the tribute of my over-lordship upon him.”¹

No wonder there was terror at the approach of the Assyrian. No one liked to face the possibility of being hung on a pole on the city wall. There was no mercy to be hoped for; the Assyrian was cruel and boastful. Isaiah vividly pictures them as saying:

By the strength of my hand have I done it,
And by my wisdom, for I have discernment;
And I removed the bounds of the peoples,
And their treasures I plundered.

¹ G. A. Barton's *Archeology and the Bible*, p. 373.

And on the riches of the peoples
My hand has seized as on a nest,
As unguarded eggs are carried away,
Have I carried off all the earth;
There was none that fluttered the wing,
Or opened the beak and chirped.

(*Isa.* 10:13, 14)

Can it be possible that Yahweh will allow this wicked power to overcome his own people? Isaiah is heart-broken at the prospect, and pleads with the people to repent of their sins.

Come now, and let us reason together, says Yahweh;
If your sins be as scarlet they may become as white as
snow;
Be they red as crimson, they may become as wool.
If ye be willing and obedient, the good of the land shall
ye eat.
But if ye refuse and resist, by the sword be ye eaten!
The mouth of Yahweh has spoken it!

(*Isa.* 1:18-20)

But the people reply, "See how religious we are; we are filling the temple full of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts. The altar is continually wet with the blood of bullocks and lambs and he-goats. Surely Yahweh will not let any harm come upon us." But Isaiah replies for Yahweh,

What care I for the great number of your sacrifices?
Wash you, make you clean.
Let me see the evil of your doings no more.

Seek out justice, chastise the violent,
Right the orphan, plead for the widow.

(*Isa.* 1: 11, 16-17)

No hope for you, O Judah, unless you stop robbing the widow and orphan! Going to the temple with offerings will not help you. The Assyrians are almost at your gates; the villages of Judah are already destroyed. What will you do?

Your land is a desolation, your cities are burned with fire,
Your tilled land—strangers devour it before your face.
Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard,
Like a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, like a besieged city.
(*Isa.* 1: 7, 8)

Put beside this the following account left by Sennacherib, and see how rapidly destruction was drawing near to Jerusalem.

“As to Hezekiah, the Judean, who has not submitted to my yoke, 46 of his strongholds, fortified cities, and smaller cities of their environs without number, with the onset of battering rams and the attack of engines, mines, breaches, and axes (?), I besieged, I captured. 200,150 people, small and great, male and female, horses, mules, asses, camels, oxen, and sheep without number I brought out of their midst and counted as booty. He himself I shut up like a caged bird in Jerusalem, his capital city; I erected beleaguering works against him, and turned back by command every one who came out of his city gate.”¹

Can you not see the people scrambling about in

¹ G. A. Barton's *Archeology and the Bible*, p. 373.

their fright to find a way to save themselves? Some would take their treasures and bury them; some would try to make secret hiding places for themselves. Some would become reckless and cry, "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die. (*Isa. 22: 13*)

In the midst of all this distress king Hezekiah repented. He saw that he had been foolish and had done wrong not to follow Isaiah's advice. So he made up his mind to send to Sennacherib at once the tribute which he had refused to pay. As he could not now gather enough money from the people, he cut off the gold from the temple pillars and sent it to Sennacherib at the city of Lachish. (*II Kings 18: 13-16*)

Sennacherib boasts of this in his inscription and tells of many other things that Hezekiah sent him:

"As to Hezekiah himself, the fear of the lustre of my lordship overcame him. . . . With 30 talents of gold, 800 talents of silver, precious stones, rouge, . . . beds of ivory, stationary ivory thrones, elephant's hide, . . . all sorts of objects, a heavy tribute."¹

But Hezekiah had repented too late to keep the Assyrian back. Rabshakeh, the Assyrian general, appeared before the walls and demanded the surrender of the city. Then did Hezekiah send for Isaiah and humbly repent and beg his help. And Isaiah looked into the face of the king that he had loved as a young man, and, seeing there the signs of true repentance, he spoke words of comfort. "Be

¹ *Ib.* p. 373.

not afraid." More than this, Isaiah declared that the Assyrian should not enter the city. (*Isa. 37: 1-7*)

"Therefore thus saith Yahweh concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come unto this city, nor shoot an arrow there, neither shall he come before it with shield, nor cast a mount against it. For I will defend the city." (*Isa. 37: 33-35*)

Imagine the excitement in Jerusalem when the words reached them! Can you not see the people running about the narrow streets saying to each other, Isaiah is at the court again and he declares that Yahweh will protect Jerusalem!

Some believed it, some scoffed at it. But all would soon see. Sennacherib continued to demand the surrender of the city, sending a letter which Hezekiah took to the temple and spread out before Yahweh. Any moment might bring the attack on the city.

One morning the watchers were scanning the horizon to the south for any signs of the coming Assyrian army. What is that dark object coming nearer? A man running. On he comes and soon is near enough to shout the news:

"The angel of Yahweh went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and four score and five thousand." (*Isa. 37: 36*) (*II Kings 19: 35*)

With what awe and thankfulness the listeners would bow their heads! Then quickly they would let the

messenger in to hear the rest of his story. The army had disappeared, he would tell them, leaving in the camp only the five thousand a hundred and four score "dead corpses." Those had died of some terrible disease, probably what we now call bubonic plague, which they believed Yahweh must have sent upon them. People in those far-away days thought that all sickness came as a punishment from some god. All Judah, therefore, now rejoiced over the deliverance of Judah by the "angel of Yahweh."

Here is victory for Isaiah the prophet! Had he not said that Yahweh would protect Jerusalem and that no one could destroy the holy temple? Now he is proved right. No more will he be a laughing-stock but all will kiss his robes and ask, "What may we do to be forgiven?" To all this Isaiah joyfully replied, perhaps in the same words that he had long addressed to their unheeding ears,

"Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from mine eyes; cease to do evil:

Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." (*Isa.* 1: 6, 17)

Thus Isaiah turns his victory into a victory for the righteousness of the people of Judah. He begins a new era for Jerusalem.

CHAPTER XVII

JERUSALEM BECOMES HOLY

Days of jubilee followed the delivery of Jerusalem from the Assyrian army. Again people brought forth their treasures and began to make plans for a happy life. What enemy need they fear now if Yahweh would help them? Ah, but Yahweh will be with you only if you are righteous, Isaiah kept reminding them. They knew this was true, and they joined together to try to make Jerusalem holy. Slaves were set free, widows received again their houses and lands from those who had stolen them, orphans were given back the money that belonged to them. Everybody declared that he would be fair and just in all his dealings.

Hezekiah also cleansed the temple. He called together priests and people who brought out many things that did not belong to Yahweh worship and destroyed them. One thing that he destroyed was a "brazen serpent." (*II Kings* 18:4) Probably this was many centuries old, part of their ancient desert worship. When they lived in the desert where snakes were dangerous, they made a snake-god out of brass to pray before so that snakes would not bite them. There is an old story about this brazen serpent. One time when serpents bit many

of the children of Israel and they died, the old story says,

“Yahweh said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass that every-one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and set it upon a pole: and it came to pass that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he looked upon the serpent of brass, he lived.” (*Numbers* 21: 8, 9)

This is the account of an old story teller who wanted to explain why the serpent was in the temple. Perhaps the story teller did not think that Hezekiah ought to destroy the serpent because, he said, Moses had made it at the command of Yahweh. Indeed, many of the people were probably frightened when they saw Hezekiah dare to bring the serpent out of the temple and break it in pieces, for, they thought, “Now the serpents may come and bite us.” It was because so many of the people actually believed in the power of the brass serpent that Hezekiah said what he did when he broke it.

“Nehushtan” cried the king, as he tore apart the shining metal. This Hebrew word means “brass,” and the people thus knew that the king did not believe the serpent to be a god at all but only a piece of brass, a mere nothing. And Hezekiah “trusted in Yahweh, the God of Israel.” (*II Kings* 18: 4, 5)

Another thing that Hezekiah did to make people worship Yahweh only was to remove the “high

places.” These high places, or hill tops, you remember, were where the Canaanites worshiped their Baals or gods of the land. The people of Judah said that they worshiped Yahweh at the high places, but the truth is that it was hard to tell whom they were worshiping, for they did exactly the same things that the Canaanites did. They went to feasts on the hill tops and drank wine till they were drunk and immoral. Now Hezekiah and Isaiah said, The only way to stop this is to remove the altars and pillars from those high places so that people cannot worship there. And Hezekiah proclaimed to all the people before the altar of the temple in Jerusalem, saying,

“Ye shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem.” (*II Kings* 18: 22)

Thus all eyes and hearts turned toward the purified, holy Jerusalem and from this time on it was the one great place to worship the true God.

Probably the city was now rebuilt and made beautiful in many ways, but of one improvement we have a definite account:

“Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and all his might, and how he made a pool, and a conduit, and brought water into the city, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?” (*II Kings* 20:20)

This “book of chronicles” tells us no more, but

the rocks of Jerusalem and an old record do. Opening out of the one spring of Jerusalem there is a rock-cutting that is the beginning of Hezekiah's conduit. He cut it high enough for a man to walk through. One reason for doing this is that the Jerusalem spring is intermittent; ordinarily the water is only a foot or two deep, but several times a day it rises up to four or five feet. Hezekiah cut this tunnel through the solid rock for seventeen hundred feet so that the water could empty into a pool inside the city walls. Then if enemies surrounded the city, the women could fill their water-jars inside the city wall instead of exposing themselves to the arrows that might be shot at them outside. The old city wall passed between the spring and the pool. A tunnel of this description still exists in Jerusalem. The promoter of this fine piece of engineering, presumably Hezekiah, made a record of his work and put it in a more enduring place than a book. He wrote it on the rock inside the tunnel, and there it has remained all these centuries till 1880 when it was discovered and broken off, and this is what it says:

“The boring through (is completed). And this is the story of the boring through: while yet (they plied) the drill, each toward his fellow, and while yet there were three cubits to be bored through, there was heard the voice of one calling unto another, for there was a crevice in the rock on the right hand. And on the day of the boring through the

stone cutters struck each to meet his fellow, drill upon drill; and the waters flowed from the source to the pool for a thousand and two hundred cubits, and a hundred cubits was the height of the rock above the head of the stone-cutters.”¹

Do you see from this story how they worked? One group of workers began cutting into the rock at the spring and another group began at the pool they had walled up ready for the water. They worked toward each other with some kind of hand drills and then, one day, they heard each other's voices. This was because there was a crack in the rock through which the sound could travel. Finally the last rock was cut out and the water flowed through. It was a great piece of work to get accomplished. Probably Ahaz and many a king before Hezekiah had wished but had not dared to undertake it.

Hezekiah was one of the greatest of Judah's kings, probably the greatest since David. He was an up-builder and purifier of the city, and under the influence of Isaiah gave the poor people of Judah more justice than ever before. Perhaps it was in these happy times, as a further inspiration to Hezekiah, that Isaiah wrote his most beautiful picture of the ideal king and the ideal age. It is worth reading and thinking about and learning, for even today the world has no finer description of a leader of men. Here it is as it stands in Isaiah's book:

¹ Translation of Siloam Inscription in G. A. Barton's *Archeology and the Bible*, p. 376.

THE IDEAL AGE

There will come forth a shoot from the stock of Jesse,
And a scion from his roots will bear fruit.
The spirit of Yahweh will rest on him,
A spirit of wisdom and discernment,
A spirit of counsel and might,
A spirit of knowledge and fear of Yahweh.
He will not judge according to all that his eyes have seen,
Nor give decision according to that which his ears have
heard,
But with righteousness will he judge the helpless,
And with equity will he give decision for the destitute in
the land;
And with the breath of his lips will he slay the ungodly;
And righteousness will be the zone about his loins,
And faithfulness the girdle about his reins.
And the wolf will lodge with the lamb,
And the leopard will lie down with the kid;
And the calf and the young lion will graze together,
And a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear will graze,
Together will their young ones lie down,
And the lion will eat straw like the ox;
And the suckling child will play about the hole of the asp,
And the weaned child shall stretch forth his hand to the
basilisk's den.
And they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy moun-
tain,
For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Yahweh,
as the waters cover the sea.

(*Isa.* 11: 1-9)

Here is pictured a king who is not thinking first of how he can build up his own power, but is praying for the right spirit in everything he does, for wisdom and knowledge. When he has to make a decision he does not look at the outside of things only but examines carefully into them to be sure what is right, that he may decide with "equity." When he has discovered wrong doers he will slay them "with the breath of his lips," that is, he will denounce them publicly and destroy their wicked schemes, not kill them.

As a result of such leadership a New Age will dawn when there will be no more cruel destruction. The wolf will no longer eat the lamb, nor the leopard the kid, nor the lion the calf. These animals will learn to eat "straw," that is, grain, instead of meat. The serpents will no longer hurt little children; indeed, a little child shall be able to lead all the animals. Whether Isaiah really means that these wild animals will actually change their habits or whether this is his poetic way of saying that wolf-like men will stop preying on their brothers, perhaps we cannot be sure, but it is certain that he expected that all men's cruelty would cease and kindness and goodwill rule everywhere.

There is another piece of poetry in the book of *Isaiah* akin to this that may not have been written by him but was certainly inspired by Isaiah's beautiful words. He saw the terrible cruelty of war that had killed thousands upon thousands of the best people of the nations. If, then, the perfect age is

to come, it is certain that wars must cease. Of the people of that day the writer says, .

They shall beat their swords into plowshares,
And their spears into pruning-hooks;
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
Neither shall they learn war any more.

(*Isa. 2: 4*)

Isaiah, then, helped make the Jerusalem of his own day holy, but, more important still, he pointed ahead to a more perfect time. He gave the world an ideal towards which lovers of peace have ever since been stretching out their hands. When can his ideal be realized?

CHAPTER XVIII

DARK DAYS FOR JUDAH

When Hezekiah died, his twelve-year-old son, Manasseh, became king; but he was not at all like his father. He seems to have begun at once to undo all the good things that Hezekiah had done. One cannot help asking, Why? Had this twelve-year-old boy been sorry to see Jerusalem made holy? No, the probability is that some older person really had the power during the years when the boy king began to reign. Perhaps the person is made known to us in the words: "and his mother's name was Hephzibah." (*II Kings* 21:1) Who was Hephzibah? Was she perhaps once a girl in the house of a priest of one of the high places in Judah? It would have been natural for Hezekiah to have married such a girl in his early years before he thought the high places were wrong. We really know nothing about Hephzibah but we do know that when Manasseh became king, through the influence of some one, he turned everything back.

"He built again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed: and he reared up altars for Baal and made an Asherah as did Ahab, king of Israel, and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served them." (*II Kings* 21:3)

Why did King Manasseh, and no doubt many others, want these high places rebuilt? First, because they were afraid of the Baals or lords of the land. For so many centuries people had believed that these Baalim made the grain and grapes grow in the fields that they could not give up the idea that these local gods would be offended and not give the grain if they were not worshiped. Second, because the people so much enjoyed the feast days at the high places. With music and wine the people danced and sang and told stories at the high-place feasts. Why should they lose their good times? Third, because it was too far and too much trouble to journey from the more distant places to Jerusalem to make their offerings to Yahweh and attend his feasts. One can see that there were many reasons why the people would not like to have their home places of worship forbidden. No doubt many of the people and priests went up to Jerusalem as soon as they heard that Hezekiah was dead, to ask the new king to let them have their high places again. Probably they offered him money, and Hephzibah and others may have urged him to take it.

In Jerusalem, too, Hezekiah's work was undone by building altars to other gods in the temple. Manasseh "built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of Yahweh." (*II Kings* 21: 4, 5) That means that the sun, moon, and stars were worshiped in Yahweh's temple! The moon worship was a part of the people's life long before in the desert, but the sun worship had been adopted from

Assyria. Ahaz had introduced it. The Egyptians, too, worshiped the sun. Probably many of the rich people in Judah felt that they were quite behind the times if they did not worship the sun as all the great and powerful nations did, especially Egypt, so close to Judah. The Egyptians wrote many hymns to the sun. One of them begins thus:

Hail to thee, beautiful god of every day!
Rising in the morning without ceasing,
(Not) wearied in labor.¹

No wonder people were fascinated by the great ball of fire, rolling daily through the sky. How could people in those days help thinking it was a god who gave light and warmth? At least it was easy to believe that your powerful neighbors were right in thinking so. Moreover Assyria expected her subjects to worship her gods.

A horrible practice that was introduced again by Manasseh was human sacrifice, especially the sacrifice of children. Manasseh sacrificed his own son as Ahaz had also done. (*II Kings* 16:3, 21:6) This is what is meant by the words, "He made his own son to pass through the fire." This was a common practice among the Canaanites, especially in the worship of Moloch. One of the high places of the Canaanites at Gezer has been found to contain the skeletons of hundreds of little children.² Probably

¹ G. A. Barton's *Archeology and the Bible*, p. 402.

² G. A. Barton's *Archeology and the Bible*, p. 172, also article *Moloch* in *Jewish Encyclopedia*.

it was Manasseh's first-born child that was sacrificed, for it was the ancient idea that the first son belonged to a god.

But one of the glories of the people of Israel is that they tried to stop this inhuman custom long before other nations did. One of their oldest story-books contains the story of the sacrifice of Isaac. The important thing about this story is that Isaac was not sacrificed, and that Yahweh did not wish him to be. To be sure, God wanted father and son to be willing; and so they took a journey to a sacred rock and made all things ready for the sacrifice; but suddenly the hand of Israel's God stopped the knife as it was about to strike off the head of Isaac. (*Gen.* 22: 1-14) That old story saved the life of many a child. An old law also provided that a lamb might be sacrificed in place of the first-born. (*Ex.* 34: 20)

Perhaps it was when Manasseh had brought back human sacrifice that the following splendid words were added to the Book of Micah by some prophet:

Wherewith shall I come before Yahweh?
Shall I give my first-born son for my transgression,
And the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
Yea, what doth Yahweh seek from thee,
But to do justice and love kindness
And to walk humbly with thy God?

(*Micah* 6: 6-8)

The work of the prophets was not stopped in these terrible times. No true prophet ever has his mouth stopped by kings. Here is one prophet who dared

to speak out against the sacrifice of the first-born son and say that Yahweh desired justice and kindness for his sacrifices, not the flowing of blood.

The book of *Kings* tells us about an unnamed prophet who was brave enough to stand up and speak plainly on another point thus:

“Thus saith Yahweh, the God of Israel, Behold, I bring such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle. And I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria and the plummet of the house of Ahab: and I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down.” (*II Kings* 21: 12, 13)

What a homely, picturesque figure this old prophet uses! So long as a dish has something good to eat in it, people keep it right side up, but when the food is spoiled, they throw it out, wash the dish, wipe it, and turn it upside down. Such an unclean dish had Jerusalem become.

Where was Isaiah during these days of return to wickedness? Alas, none of the books tell us, but there is an old Hebrew legend that says he was put to death by Manasseh. (*Heb.* 11: 37) Certainly it is impossible to think that Isaiah would remain quiet when Judah was becoming so untrue to Yahweh and certainly Manasseh would not long let him speak. So many people did the king put to death that the historian says of him, “Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another.” (*II Kings* 21: 16)

Nevertheless, the prophets found a way to make their work live,—they wrote a book. This was a new way to speak to people, for up to this time Judah was not a book-reading nation. Some of the prophets had written out parts of their messages and some people had read them, but now the disciples of Isaiah wrote a book for all Judah to study and live by. They used in their book a little collection of laws written sometime before and known to the priests. This little *Book of the Covenant* (*Exodus* 20–23) contained the ten commandments, which perhaps most of the people knew. To these were now added laws of these unknown prophetic writers demanding the return to the reforms of Hezekiah. Pillars and asherah were to be thrown out of the temple (*Deut.* 7:5) and all the people of Judah were to come to the purified Jerusalem to worship. This was the most important point in the new book because it meant that the high places where there was so much wickedness would again be destroyed. This is the way the new book spoke of the high places:

Ye shall utterly destroy all the places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills and under every green tree: and ye shall break down their altars, and dash in pieces their pillars, and burn their Asherah with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods; and ye shall destroy their name out of that place. Ye shall not do so unto Yahweh your God. But unto the place which Yahweh your God shall choose out of all

your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come. (*Deut.* 12: 2-5)

Ever since the days of David, Jerusalem had been the *chief* high place where Yahweh had chosen "to put his name." Now that everybody knew of the deliverance of the city from Sennacherib and its purification by Hezekiah and Isaiah, the prophets were sure Jerusalem must be the *only* place to worship Yahweh. They felt that they could not die without leaving this teaching in a book for the young people of a happier time to read. But what could they do with the book? If any of the friends of Manasseh found it, they certainly would destroy it as well as the people who wrote it. There must be found a way to hide it and save it. How?

We can imagine the way that they decided upon, for we have the story of its finding. We know that the book was found some years later in the temple. Did these disciples of Isaiah meet in the temple, then, perhaps in the night, and place there the sacred law that it might be found sometime and lead the people back to the right way? Perhaps they did not hide the book until many of their number had been killed by Manasseh and they were sure they would not live to hand it on to others. Or the few that were left knew that their only hope of saving the book was to have it out of their hands and in the temple.

During these dark days of persecution a little group kept the torch of truth burning. As we are

tracing the story of the Hebrew nation we see them climbing step by step upward, but sometimes they seem to slip back and we wonder if all is lost. Such a slip-back was the reign of Manasseh and it might have ended every hope that Judah would ever be a truly great nation. But Isaiah's "remnant," the little group of disciples, saved her, though probably few of them lived to see the light dawn again. Not only Judah but the world is thankful to that little group of men who gave up their lives but found the way to hand on the truth in a book.

CHAPTER XIX

A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS

“Amon was twenty-two years old when he began to reign; and he reigned two years in Jerusalem. . . . And he did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, as did Manasseh his father.” (*II Kings* 21: 19, 20)

The black darkness continued for two years after Manasseh's death because he had taught his son Amon to be like himself. But when, after Amon's death, his eight-year-old son Josiah became king, the gray of the dawn began to appear, for it was no longer certain death for a prophet to speak. Josiah's mother's name was Jedidah. Perhaps she had hated the cruelty and oppression of her husband's reign and was able to teach the little boy king to desire better things for Judah. At any rate we know that again the voice of a prophet was heard in the land. It was a voice of warning:

Blow ye the trumpet in the land,
Cry with a loud voice,
Assemble yourselves and let us go
Into fortified cities.
Lift the standard toward Zion,
Flee, stay not.
For evil comes from the north,
And a great destruction.

A lion is gone up from his thicket,
And a destroyer of nations,
He starts forth, comes from his place,
The world to lay waste.

For this, gird you with sackcloth,
Wail and howl,
For it will not turn back from us,
The fierce anger of Yahweh.

(*Jeremiah 4: 5-8*)

Passers by in the streets of Jerusalem or in a village market place who drew near to look at the speaker found a young man, almost a boy. Who was this young man and what meant his warning cry?

To find the answer to these questions we must travel in imagination to the little village of Anathoth, an hour's journey northeast of Jerusalem. There dwelt "Hilkiah, of the priests that were in Anathoth," with his wife and at least one son, Jeremiah, greatly beloved. Who were these priests of Anathoth? They may possibly have been descendants of Abiathar, the high priest whom Solomon drove out of Jerusalem, (*I Kings 2: 26, 27*) or they may have been priests driven out of the temple by Manasseh because of their sympathy with Isaiah and his teachings. This seems more likely because we later find a man named Hilkiah as high priest in Jerusalem who is interested in a reformed Judah. This would be strange for any one who had been willing to have all the idolatry in the temple that Manasseh wanted.

If, then, Hilkiab had been forcibly banished from Jerusalem he would feel keenly the injustice of it. Jeremiah, his son, born in these dark times, would hear from his earliest years about the wickedness of Jerusalem and would often hear the story of Isaiah and his disciples. Many a day as Jeremiah played about in the great living-room of the family where his mother was cooking with her cauldrons he no doubt heard his father talking with his friends about how the "prophets prophesy falsely and the priests bear rule by their means" and how the people did not seem to dislike the false prophets and priests to whom Manasseh had given power. Indeed, all Jerusalem seemed as full of wicked people as a cage is full of birds. "They watch as fowlers lie in wait; they set a trap, they catch men!"

As Jeremiah grew older he not only listened but asked questions, (*Jer.* 5:26-31). Why did Yahweh allow such wickedness to continue? Surely he will be avenged on such a nation as this! Will he not again send a prophet? One day when Jeremiah happened to be left alone in the room with his mother's boiling cauldron, as he sat brooding over the wickedness of Judah, he seemed to hear the voice of Yahweh to which he could not but make answer:

VOICE OF YAHWEH: Jeremiah! Before I formed thee I knew thee; before thou camest forth from thy mother I sanctified thee: I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nations.

JEREMIAH: Ah, Yahweh God! behold I cannot speak: for I am a child.

VOICE OF YAHWEH: Say not, I am a child: for to whomsoever

I shall send thee thou shalt go and whatsoever I shall command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid.

JEREMIAH: Put forth thy hand and touch my mouth.

VOICE OF YAHWEH: Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. Jeremiah, what seest thou?

JEREMIAH: I see a seething cauldron; and the face thereof is from the north.

VOICE OF YAHWEH: Out of the north evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land. For, lo, I will call all the families of the kingdoms of the north, saith Yahweh; and they shall come, and they shall set every one his throne at the entering of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all the walls thereof round about, and against all the cities of Judah. And I will utter my judgments against them, touching all their wickedness; in that they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshiped the works of their own hands.

Now, therefore, gird up thy loins, and arise and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at them, lest I dismay thee before them. (*Jer. 1: 4-9, 13-17*)

With what throbbings of heart Jeremiah must have heard these words which were to change his whole life! It was a voice sounding from the depths of his own heart, answering the questions of which he had long been thinking. He himself was to be the much needed prophet and to proclaim coming punishment.

What he told his father and mother we do not know, or whether they approved of his sudden decision, but soon he was out in the public highways crying out to the people to flee into the fortified cities, for punishment was coming. His boyish voice must have rung out sharply in the turmoil of the market-place. Shepherds and traders and boys at

their play stopped to hear what this young fellow was saying. Some laughed at him, some listened carefully. It must have been hard for Jeremiah to do this work, for everything that we know about him later shows that he was a gentle, lovable boy, very sensitive to what others thought of him, yet brave as a lion to go forth to do his duty.

This, then, is the voice crying in the darkness, the voice of the young man, Jeremiah; but what of his message of destruction? It was undoubtedly to the Scythians that he looked to punish Judah's wickedness. These barbarians had been pouring into the lands far north of Judah for several years, but recently they were moving down the coast toward Egypt. Everywhere they went they burned, destroyed, killed. Would they come into Judah? Jeremiah said yes, not because he knew any more than any one else about the movements of the Scythians but because he thought Judah too wicked to escape punishment.

Let us imagine ourselves standing in one of the little market squares in Jerusalem listening to Jeremiah. See how he explains first that he speaks because Yahweh has sent him:

The word of Yahweh came to me saying, Go, and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith Yahweh, I remember for thee the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals; how thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. I brought you into a plentiful land, to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof; but when ye entered, ye defiled my land, and

made mine heritage an abomination. . . . Wherefore I will yet plead with you, saith Yahweh. (*Jer.* 2:1-9)

You can see from his words that Jeremiah's parents had told him stories of the early days of the Hebrew people, when they lived in the desert with Yahweh's loving care around them. God had led them to the rich land of Canaan and there they had ungratefully forsaken him. They, therefore, deserve destruction; and are not the cruel Scythians on the way?

Hear, O earth: behold I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts.

Behold a people cometh from the north country; and a great nation shall be stirred up from the uttermost parts of the earth. They lay hold on bow and spear; they are cruel, and have no mercy; their voice roareth like the sea, and they ride upon horses; every one set in array, as a man to the battle, against thee, O daughter of Zion. (*Jer.* 6: 19, 22, 23)

Now a strange thing happened. The Scythians came while Jeremiah was proclaiming that they would. But they did not punish Judah. This is the account told by an old historian, Herodotus:

“They (the Scythians) marched forward with the design of invading Egypt. When they had reached Palestine, however, Psammaticus, the Egyptian king, met them with gifts and prayers, and prevailed on them to advance no further. On their return, passing through Circalon, a city of Syria, the greater part of them went their way

without doing any damage; but some of them who lagged behind pillaged the temple of Celestian Venus." (*Herodotus* 1: 105)

Does this mean that Jeremiah's prophecy was wrong? Yes and no, both! He was wrong about the Scythians punishing Judah for their sins but he was right that Judah needed punishment and would get it sometime. Jeremiah was right about the all-important thing—that Judah should repent. So he was still a prophet though he made a mistake about the coming of the Scythians. Men become prophets when they see right into the hearts of people and try to help them morally and spiritually.

CHAPTER XX

THE FINDING OF THE LAW-BOOK

The young man, Jeremiah, was troubled that the Scythians had not punished Judah as he expected. What could be Yahweh's plan, he asked himself as he went about and found people would listen to him no longer. One day he went off into the fields alone to think and pray. As he walked along he kept saying to himself, Can it be that Yahweh does not watch over his word? It was the early spring time and flowers were beginning to show some bright color around the gray Judean rocks. But no tree (except the almond) as yet gave any sign of life. Suddenly Jeremiah found himself standing close to an almond tree that had put forth its delicate pink and white blossoms when all other trees were yet bare. As he looked at its beauty the name of the tree went through his mind—*Shakedh*, as it is in Hebrew. But that is almost the same as the Hebrew word *Shokedh*, which means to keep watch over. Then Jeremiah was filled with joy and he seemed to hear Yahweh speaking to him.

VOICE OF YAHWEH: Jeremiah, what seest thou?

JEREMIAH: I see a rod of an almond tree (*Shakedh*).

VOICE OF YAHWEH: Thou hast well seen; for I watch over (*Shokedh*) my word to perform it. (*Jer.* 1:11, 12.)

Thus did a message of comfort and encouragement come to Jeremiah from the flowering almond tree. From that time on he felt sure that he had not been wrong in his first preaching and that Yahweh would watch over his word to perform it, by some other people if not by the Scythians or in a new way altogether. Judah must be punished if she would not repent.

Perhaps it was not far from this time that new hope came to all in Judah who loved righteousness, through Josiah, the boy king. He seemed to want to do right. He made up his mind to purify and repair the temple; he appears to have appointed Hilkiyah, the high-priest, to do this work. This was, perhaps, Jeremiah's father, who had been called from Anathoth and restored to the high-priesthood. Here is the order of the king, given to Shaphan, the scribe:

Go up to Hilkiyah, the high-priest, that he may sum the money which is brought into the house of Yahweh, which the keepers of the door have gathered of the people: and let them deliver it into the hand of the workmen that have oversight of the house of Yahweh: and let them give it unto the workmen which are in the house of Yahweh, to repair the breaches of the house; unto the carpenters, and to the builders, and to the masons; and for buying timber and hewn stone to repair the house. (*II Kings 22:4-6*)

This sounds almost like the plans for building and repairing such as one would make today. Hilkiyah was the chief manager and he gave out to each worker the part that he was to do. Carpenters and

masons and stone-cutters were to do their share of work and get their share of pay out of the temple money. But listen to this strange statement about their pay:

There was no reckoning made with them of the money delivered into their hand; for they dealt faithfully. (*II Kings* 22: 7)

These workmen could be trusted not to take more money than belonged to them for their work. Was it because they were workmen on the holy temple that they had a special sense of honor about their work? Perhaps, but at any rate it stands as a fine example to us all in our work. To give good service for the money we get and to be trustworthy should be the ideal of every one.

One reason why we should like to know certainly whether Hilkiāh the high-priest was Jeremiah's father or not is that if he was, he may have known about the hidden law-book. He could not help hunting for it if he knew that some disciples of Isaiah had written a book and had hidden it in the temple. The Bible does tell us that it was Hilkiāh who found the law-book, for it says,

And Hilkiāh the high-priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of Yahweh. And Hilkiāh gave the book to Shaphan and he read it. (*II Kings* 22: 8)

Hilkiāh does not seem to have been surprised at finding the book or at what it said. So he probably

knew all about it and had long been hoping and praying for the day to come when he could bring it forth. Shaphan was so astonished at the book that he hurried with it to the king.

Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, Hilki'ah the priest hath delivered me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king. And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes. (*II Kings* 22: 10, 11)

So terrible did the words of the book seem to the king that he felt that he must have the word of some prophet about it. Perhaps Jeremiah was too young a man for him to think of, or perhaps Hilki'ah did not want to bring his own son. At any rate the king spoke to Hilki'ah and some others, saying,

Go ye, inquire of Yahweh for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found: for great is the wrath of Yahweh that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book. (*II Kings* 22: 13)

It was a prophetess that they brought to the king—Huldah, the wife of Shallum. She lived in the "second quarter" of Jerusalem and she seemed to know all about the book. Perhaps she had known some of the disciples of Isaiah who wrote it. She sent strong words back to the king to tell him to obey this book,

Tell ye the men that sent you unto me, Thus saith Yahweh, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and

upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read: because they have forsaken me and burned incense unto other gods. (*II Kings* 22: 15-17)

She promised the king, however, that he should not see great evil come to Judah because his "heart was tender." But he rent his clothes and wept.

Then the king called a great meeting of all the people in the temple to read them the book. We know today that this book was the greater part of what we call the book of *Deuteronomy*. It was the first big law-book that all the people knew about. As we turn to the book today we can see why the king was so troubled by it. To worship at high places was forbidden, and this they had been doing all through Manasseh's reign. The central sanctuary, evidently Jerusalem, was the place to offer sacrifice to Yahweh, said the book, and they had been even worshiping the Baal there! So king and people read and took a vow together.

The king stood by the pillar, and made a covenant before Yahweh . . . to confirm the words of this covenant that were written in this book: and all the people stood to the covenant. (*II Kings* 23: 3)

Then did king and people again purify the temple as Hezekiah had done. They brought out all the idolatrous things and destroyed them in the Kidron valley. Moreover, all the high places were ordered to be defiled and their priests removed.

Among those who must have rejoiced in this puri-

fiction was Jeremiah. At least his own book, written much later, has an account of his going to the village Anathoth to preach against the high place there. It made the "men of Anathoth" angry for they wanted to keep their high place and they plotted to kill Jeremiah, saying,

Let us destroy the tree with the fruit thereof, and let us cut him off from the land of the living that his name be no more remembered. (*Jer.* 11: 19)

Jeremiah had no idea that his townsmen could be so cruel; he fell into their trap and "was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter." But he found out their schemes just in time to save himself. He said,

Yahweh gave me knowledge of it, and I knew it: then thou shewedst me their doings. But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter. (*Jer.* 11: 18, 19)

Jeremiah was probably one of the young men whom Josiah appointed to help him see that Judah kept the new law. This chapter of Judah's history is one of the fine ones to read, for her life was shaped by vigorous young men. Josiah, the young king, was supported by the young prophet Jeremiah and a group of young men several of whose names we know. It was a young men's age, and may we not call it one of Judah's periods of greatness?

A great nation is one with great ideals to which most of her people are loyal. Measured by this rule perhaps we can say that Judah had now become a

great nation. Certainly she was now taking deep into her life ideals that she would never give up even when no longer a nation living under a government of her own.

CHAPTER XXI

JEREMIAH'S CHALLENGE TO JUDAH

Josiah, the splendid young king who purified Judah, met his death suddenly in battle, an event that brought grief to all the people and especially to Jeremiah the prophet. This is the way it came about that Judah lost her good king. Down in Egypt there was a new king named Pharaoh Necho. He looked up to the land of Palestine and wished he could rule there, or at least that he could collect money from there instead of letting the people send their money to Assyria. So he got his soldiers together and marched right up the coast to take the northern land first. Now Josiah did not think it right to allow this Egyptian king to take the land and money, so he marched north to stop him. It was at Megiddo, in the great plain of Esdraelon, that the two kings met. And Pharaoh Necho "slew him at Megiddo when he had seen him." This sounds as though some one said, See, there is the king of Judah, and Pharaoh said to his archers, Shoot him with your arrows.

They brought the dead king in his chariot from the battlefield down to Jerusalem, and great was the sorrow of the people as they "buried him in his own sepulchre." Jeremiah later paid high tribute to him, saying,

Did he not eat and drink and all justly and rightly?
. . . He judged the cause of the poor and needy. . . Is
not this to know me? saith Yahweh. (*Jer.* 22: 15, 16)

Jehoiahaz became king in place of Josiah, but the
Egyptian king did not let him reign long; he carried
him off to Egypt in chains as a slave. People were
still mourning for Josiah and Jeremiah said,

Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him:
But weep sore for him that goeth away;
For he shall return no more, nor see his native land.
(*Jer.* 22: 10)

Soon after Josiah's death the priests of the high
places refused to obey the Book of the Law which
they had found in the temple and had all vowed to
keep. This made Jeremiah grieve as the following
words show,

Why is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a
perpetual backsliding? They hold fast deceit, they re-
fuse to return. I hearkened and heard but they spoke
not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, say-
ing, What have I done? Every one turneth to his course,
as a horse that rusheth headlong in the battle. Yea, the
stork in heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the
turtle and the swallow and the crane observe the time of
their coming; but my people know not the ordinance of
Yahweh. How do ye say, We are wise, and the law of
Yahweh is with us. (*Jer.* 8: 5-8)

The people did not really care about the law deep
down in their hearts; they had been keeping it as a

set of rules. The stork goes the right way because she knows the right way. The swallow flies back north in the spring because something within tells her it is time to go. That is what Jeremiah wants of the people of Judah, to do right because their hearts say it is right. Then they would go on doing right even if their king were killed and there were no one to make them keep the law. But instead they backslid at once.

All this made Jeremiah deeply discouraged, because evil seemed to be ruling. He cried out in his agony,

Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? Wherefore are all they at ease that deal very treacherously? Thou hast planted them, yea they have taken root; they grow, yea, they bring forth fruit. (*Jer.* 12:1, 2)

So terrible does the triumph of wickedness seem to Jeremiah that he will not go about with people having a good time but sits and thinks and prays alone. He cries out to Yahweh,

I sat not in the assembly of them that make merry, nor rejoiced: I sat alone because of thy hand; for thou hast filled me with indignation. Why is my pain perpetuated, and my wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed? Wilt thou indeed be unto me as a deceitful brook, as waters that fail? (*Jer.* 15:17, 18)

Some of these words sound almost like complaining. Was it right for Jeremiah to speak such words to his God? Yes, for he spoke them honestly and

felt that they brought an answer from God asking him to purify himself.

VOICE OF GOD: If thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth. . . . And I will make thee unto this people a fenced brazen wall; and they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee to save thee and to deliver thee, saith Yahweh. And I will deliver thee out of the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem thee out of the hand of the terrible." (*Jer.* 15: 19-21)

These words seem to point to terrible days coming in which Jeremiah will be expected to do almost superhuman work. Will he be willing to get himself ready? Will he become the mouth of God to the people? That day long ago when he sat looking at his mother's boiling cauldron and heard the voice of Yahweh calling him to become a prophet must have come back to him now with new meaning.

Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth: see, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down and to destroy and to overthrow; to build and to plant. (*Jer.* 1: 9, 10)

What does all this mean that Jeremiah is actually to do next? Something so terrible and unbelievable for a man who loves his country that Jeremiah must have groaned with agony when first he understood what he must do. Probably he told no one, but set himself to get ready for the terrible work. He would not make any one else suffer; he would do the work alone. Perhaps it was at this time that the

voice of God came to him, saying, "Thou shalt not take thee a wife, neither shalt thou have sons or daughters in this place." (*Jer.* 16: 2)

Perhaps a beautiful love story lies behind these few words. In those days young men generally married early some one well known by their families. It may be that the young woman whom Jeremiah would have married had been waiting till his work for Yahweh would allow him to stay at home and care for his family. And now he saw that this could never be. His new and terrible work would take all the rest of his life.

What was this terrible work? To announce to Judah that her holy city should be destroyed and her people carried away into captivity! At last the enemy from the north was coming and this time he would not stop outside the city. The temple could not save them as it had in Isaiah's day.

When and how would Jeremiah give this message? He waited for a time when his words would be heard by all. It was on a great feast day at the temple; probably it was a special feast of rejoicing. It may have been in the year 606 B. C., when Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, fell before the Babylonians. Think how glad the Judeans would be to feel that they need never again fear this ancient enemy, Assyria. Or, this may have been a special gathering at the temple in the next year when the new power that had overthrown Assyria marched over to Palestine and defeated the Egyptian king, making the Judeans feel that now all their old enemies were

robbed of their power. But Jeremiah fixed his eyes upon that new power, Babylonia, and saw that it would be even more dangerous than the old power to such a wicked and foolish nation as Judah. He saw that unless they repented, Jerusalem would become like Shiloh, an old sanctuary of Israel, now a complete desolation. The following brief drama shows Jeremiah giving his terrible message:

JEREMIAH'S TEMPLE MESSAGE

SCENE: *Court of the temple; the people bringing offerings to the high priest. Music of cymbals. JEREMIAH stands watching, but suddenly steps to center.*

JEREMIAH: O children of Judah, Thus saith Yahweh: If ye will not hearken unto me, to walk in my law, which I have set before you, to hearken to the words of my servants, the prophets, whom I send unto you, even rising up early and sending them, but ye have not hearkened; then will I make this house like Shiloh, and make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth.

PEOPLE: *(after listening a moment in dumb amazement, shout—)*

The temple of Yahweh, the temple of Yahweh!

JEREMIAH: Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of Yahweh, the temple of Yahweh,—the temple of Yahweh are these. If ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor; if ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow . . . then will I cause you to dwell in this place.

VOICE FROM THE CROWD: We are delivered. Our ancient enemies are overcome; we are delivered.

JEREMIAH: Will ye steal, murder, and come and stand before me in this house and say, We are delivered, that ye may do these abominations? Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold I, even I, have

seen 'it, saith Yahweh. But go ye unto my place in Shiloh and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel. And now, because ye have done all these works therefore will I do unto the house wherein ye trust as I have done to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your brethren.

THE HIGH PRIEST: (*seizing JEREMIAH roughly*) Thou shalt surely die. Why hast thou prophesied in the name of Yahweh, saying, This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate, without inhabitant?

PEOPLE: (*shout as they drag him away*) To the gate for trial. To the princes for judgment!

(Founded on *Jer.* 26)

Here we have a picture of one of the bravest deeds a man ever dared. He risked his life to make his countrymen realize their danger. He wanted to save them from that danger not by urging them to fight the coming enemy or by trying to buy them off, but by becoming a stronger, finer nation morally. The words he seems most often to have said were,

“Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place.”

CHAPTER XXII

A PROPHET ON TRIAL

It was to the "New Gate" of the temple that the priests dragged Jeremiah for trial. The public gateway seems to have been the place where all ancient eastern peoples held their courts. This made it a public affair and gave any one who had any evidence a chance to shout it out. It gave the people a voice in the trial. The accuser made his complaint, the accused and his friends made their defence, and the people shouted their opinion. Then the judge, having heard all, decided whether the accused was guilty or not. Let us now picture for ourselves the trial of Jeremiah from the account given in his book. (Ch. 26: 8-24)

TRIAL OF THE PROPHET JEREMIAH

(People and priests enter dragging along JEREMIAH as they shout.)

PEOPLE: Thou shalt surely die!

AHIKAM: *(with a group of priests hastens forward)* Why these shouts for death?

PRIEST: *(who has constituted himself judge, speaks to JEREMIAH)* Why hast thou prophesied in the name of Yahweh, saying, This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be without inhabitant?

AHIKAM: Truly, but why death?

PRIEST: This man is worthy of death; for he hath prophesied against this city, as ye have heard with your ears.

JEREMIAH: (*stepping forward*) Yahweh sent me to prophesy against the house and against this city all the words ye have heard. Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of Yahweh your God; and Yahweh will repent him of the evil that he hath pronounced against you.

But as for me, behold, I am in your hand: do with me as is good and right in your eyes. Only know ye for certain that, if ye put me to death, ye shall bring innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof: for of a truth Yahweh hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears.

PEOPLE AND PRINCES: Nay, this man is not worthy of death. Nay, he hath spoken to us in the name of Yahweh, our God.

AHIKAM: Hear ye! Micaiah the Morashtite prophesied in the days of Hezekiah, King of Judah; and he spake to all the people of Judah, saying, Thus saith Yahweh of hosts: Zion shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest. Did Hezekiah, king of Judah, and all of Judah put him at all to death? Did he not fear Yahweh, and entreat the favor of Yahweh, and Yahweh repented him of the evil which he had pronounced against them? Thus should we commit great evil against our own souls.

PRIEST: (*to AHIKAM*) Wilt thou defend a destroyer of the holy city?

AHIKAM: Jeremiah is not a destroyer. He warns that we may save.

PEOPLE: (*crowding around*) A Savior, a Prophet!

AHIKAM: Thy hand hath saved him from the priests. (*to JEREMIAH*) Come thou to the temple of Yahweh.

(*They lead the way and the people follow joyously while the angry priests are left alone.*)

In some such way Jeremiah won over the young princes of Judah and the hostile people; but another

prophet of the time, Uriah, did not escape with his life. When he spoke against the city and was threatened with death he fled to Egypt. But Jehoiakim sought him out, brought him from Egypt, and had him put to death. (*Jer.* 26: 20-23) This shows that it was a real danger of death from which Jeremiah was saved by Ahikam and his friends.

It takes the moral strength out of most prophets to be the friend of princes. They are likely to think more of what the princes wish than of what is right. Not so with Jeremiah. He went on preaching his terrible message in new ways to awaken the people to their danger. Once he got some of the elders and some of the priests and took them to the Valley of Hinnom or Tophet. (See map of Jerusalem) No doubt a crowd gathered as they went along to see what would happen. When they reached the edge of the valley, Jeremiah took a "potter's earthen vessel" and, lifting it high, dashed it down upon the rocks saying,

Thus saith Yahweh of Hosts; Even so will I break this city, as one breaketh a potter's vessel, that it cannot be made whole again: and they shall bury in Tophet, till there be no place to bury.

Then came Jeremiah from Tophet, whither the Lord had sent him to prophesy; and he stood in the court of Yahweh's house, and said to all the people:

Thus saith Yahweh of Hosts, God of Israel, Behold I will bring upon this city and upon all her towns all the evil that I have pronounced against it; because they have made their neck stiff, that they might not hear my words. (*Jer.* 19: 1-3, 10-15.)

At another time Jeremiah learned a different lesson from a potter, which he taught to the people. Have you ever been in a potter's shop and watched him hold the clay in his hand while with his foot he turned the wheel that made the ugly lump of clay into a beautiful vase? The many different shapes that a skilled potter can produce with the turn of his hand seem marvelous. One day Jeremiah went to see a potter work at his wheel, and as he watched he saw a vessel marred, that is, misshapen or wrongly marked by the potter.

And when the vessel that he made of the clay was marred in the hand of the potter, he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of Yahweh came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as the potter? saith Yahweh. Behold, as the clay in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel. (*Jer.* 18: 1-6)

Judah was a vessel that had been marred and Yahweh, like the potter, was forced to make her again into another vessel. He had meant her to be a marvelously beautiful vase, but Judah herself had marred the pattern. That is one great difference between Judah and the potter's vessel,—Judah could refuse to become the kind of vessel Yahweh planned. Judah was like a live vase that could move about in the potter's hand and spoil the design. Yahweh then, was about to deal harshly with Judah as with a bad potter's vessel because she had marred the design. He wanted her to be a more

beautiful Judah, and he had a right to say that she must be beautiful because he was the potter.

You may be sure that Jeremiah was hated for continually preaching that Judah must be broken or remoulded. The following shows what happened to him once :

Now Pashur the son of Immer the priest, who was chief officer in the house of Yahweh, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things. Then Pashur smote Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in the stocks that were in the upper gate of Benjamin, which was in the house of Yahweh. (*Jer.* 20 : 1, 2)

Certainly it was hard to be a prophet in those days! To be knocked down by an officer who did not like what you said must have been painful, but probably not so trying as to be put in the stocks. Many of the people who passed through the gate of Benjamin would stop and look at Jeremiah with his feet fastened between the boards. Some would be sad because they loved him and knew that his words were true, but most would laugh and point their fingers at him in scorn.

No wonder that Jeremiah cried out in anguish,

I am become a laughing-stock all the day, every one mocketh me. For as often as I speak, I cry out, I cry, Violence and spoil; because the word of Yahweh is made a reproach unto me, and a derision, all the day. And if I say, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name, then there is in mine heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with forbearing, and I cannot contain. (*Jer.* 20 : 7-9.)

Jeremiah suffered so much that he sometimes thought he would never again speak the word of Yahweh, but then the fire of indignation burned within him and he cried out the truth again and again. Jeremiah was, then, one of the most courageous of men for he kept right on with his work though it cost him suffering all along the way. Neither the favor of princes nor the enmity of officers could move him from the right. Yahweh had indeed made him an iron pillar as he promised,

Behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee: for I am with thee, saith Yahweh, to deliver thee. (*Jer.* 1: 18, 19)

CHAPTER XXIII

JUDAH'S PUNISHMENT BEGINS

“The servants of Nebuchadrezzar King of Babylon came up to Jerusalem, and the city was besieged.”
(*II Kings* 24:10)

What excitement all around Jerusalem as the armies of Nebuchadrezzar marched up and intrenched themselves around the city! Some people fled to the homes of their kinsmen in country villages, but more people ran to get inside the walls of Jerusalem. Among those who took their things and ran into the city were the Rechabites.¹ They did not have to leave anything behind because they did not live in houses, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyards. All their lives they refused to live in cities because they wanted to be always like their ancestors who were desert people like the early children of Israel. But when danger threatened, it seems they forgot their scorn for the city and fled to its walls for protection.

Another thing the Rechabites had been commanded by their forefathers was never to drink wine. They must have been the first “teetotalers” for all other desert people drank wine and some-

¹ Rechabites, a clan of the Kenites. (*I Chron.* 2: 3, 55; *Judges* 4: 17 and 5: 24).

times got drunk, as Noah did. Perhaps Rechab saw that people were much happier when they did not do this. Anyway, the Rechabites had for many years kept the commandment of their fathers and had been different from others by not drinking wine.

When Jeremiah heard that the Rechabites were in the city he decided upon a plan that would make them known to the people of Jerusalem. This is Jeremiah's story:

I took . . . the whole house of the Rechabites; and I brought them into the house of Yahweh, into the chamber of a man of God, which was by the chamber of the princes, and I set before the sons of the house of the Rechabites bowls full of wine, and cups, and I said unto them, Drink ye wine. (*Jer.* 35 : 3-5)

How troubled and embarrassed they must have felt to have to refuse the hospitality of the prophet Jeremiah! It may be that these Rechabites were worshipers of Yahweh. They certainly would not have accepted his invitation if they had not had great respect for the prophet. Yet here he was asking them to do what they thought was wrong! They looked at the bowls of wine and the cups poured out for all; they looked at each other and with surprise at the prophet who must have acted as though it would be right for them to drink it. Jeremiah, as we have seen before, was a dramatist. He could act a part when he had a good purpose in mind. Finally the suspense and embarrassment at the feast in the temple chamber were ended by one of the Rechabites rising and saying:

We will drink no wine: for Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us saying, ye shall drink no wine, neither ye nor your sons forever: neither shall ye build house, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyard, nor have any: but all your days ye shall dwell in tents; that ye may live many days in the land wherein ye sojourn. And we have obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab in all that he charged us. (*Jer.* 35: 6-8)

How Jeremiah's face must have lighted up with joy as he heard this refusal of his hospitality! The Rechabites were courageous enough to do right; they had proved true. Now Jeremiah could go to the people with the message he had hoped to be able to give. He went to the people in the court of the temple and spoke the following words in the name of Yahweh:

The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, that he commanded his sons, not to drink wine, are performed, and unto this day they drink none, for they obey their father's commandment: but I have spoken unto you rising up early and speaking; but ye have not hearkened unto me. . . .

Forasmuch as the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab, have performed the commandment of their father which he commanded them, but the people have not hearkened unto me; therefore thus saith Yahweh, the God of Hosts, the God of Israel:

Behold, I will bring upon Judah and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the evil that I have pronounced against them: because I have spoken unto them, but they have not heard; and I have called unto them, but they have not answered. (*Jer.* 35:14-17)

Although it was now too late for Judah to save herself, Jeremiah felt that Judah must know why she was being punished. The reason why was the all important thing. Jeremiah was like a parent, who, while he is punishing a child explains why he does so, that the child may not do wrong again. Now that Judah is filled with horror at the coming of Nebuchadrezzar the conqueror, she must not blame Yahweh but her own wicked deeds.

Jeremiah's dearest friends found it very difficult to accept his teaching. Baruch was the young man who helped him write down his messages, but even as he wrote them they filled him with sorrow. Jeremiah knew this and one day he called Baruch to him and said:

O Baruch, thou didst say, Woe is me now! for Yahweh hath added sorrow to my pain; I am weary with my groaning, and I find no rest. (*Jer.* 45: 2, 3)

Baruch must have been sorry that his friend had found out how unwillingly he wrote down the messages of destruction. It seemed so terrible that Yahweh should break down that which he had built and pluck up that which he had planted that he could hardly write it on the parchment roll when Jeremiah pronounced the words. But there was another reason why it was hard for Baruch, it upset all his life plans. Apparently he had hoped to do great things; perhaps he had hoped to be a great teacher of the law, a great scribe in Israel. What could he

hope for now with destruction facing Judah? Jeremiah tells him to stop thinking about himself:

“Seekest thou great things for thy self? Seek them not.” (*Jer.* 45: 5)

If he will put away his own ambitions and consider what a splendid nation Judah may become after she is punished and purified, he will not be so rebellious.

Events moved on swiftly toward the awful punishment. One day the people of Jerusalem were horrified to find that Nebuchadrezzar had come up to the Holy City. How terrified all the people were is shown by what the king and the princes did. They were too frightened to resist.

Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon came unto the city, while his servants were besieging it; and Jehoiakim the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he, and his mother, and his servants, and his princes, and his officers: and the king of Babylon took him in the eighth year of his reign.

And he carried out thence all the treasures of the house of Yahweh, and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made. . . .

And he carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valor, even ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and the smiths; none remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land. And he carried away Jehoiakim to Babylon. (*II Kings* 24: 11-15)

What sorrow and despair filled Jerusalem! All the wealthy people and all the craftsmen who would be good workers in Babylon were hunted out and tied together into a captive train and marched off. Jeremiah wept with the others, for he knew that the heart of Yahweh was also filled with sorrow because he must punish his dearly beloved. He represents Yahweh as saying:

I have forsaken mine house,
I have cast off mine inheritance;
I have given the dearly beloved of my soul
Into the hands of her enemies.
(*Jer.* 12: 7)

Jeremiah himself said,

Woe is me for my hurt! my wound is grievous: but I said, Truly this is my grief, and I must bear it. (*Jer.* 10: 19)

CHAPTER XXIV

JEREMIAH, THE SAVIOR OF JUDAH

After that Nebuchadrezzar, King of Babylon, had carried away captive Jaconiah, "son of Jehoiahaz" king of Judah, and the princes of Judah, Yahweh showed me, and behold, two baskets of figs set before the temple of Yahweh.

One basket had very good figs like the figs that are first ripe: and the other basket had very bad figs, which could not be eaten, they were so bad. Then said Yahweh unto me, What seest thou, Jeremiah? and I said, Figs; the good figs, very good; and the bad, very bad.

Thus saith Yahweh, the God of Israel: Like these good figs so will I regard the captives of Judah whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans, for their good. (*Jer.* 24: 1-5)

The reason for the parable of the figs may have been that those who were left in Jerusalem were saying that they had not been dragged off as captives because they were better than the rich who had gone. Probably the poor now had a chance to live in some of the palaces of the rich. Some of them held important places under the new king, Zedekiah, appointed by Nebuchadrezzar. But Jeremiah saw that these who had been left behind were no better than those who had gone to Babylon—indeed they were worse because they saw no good at all in the punishment except their own petty gain. Jeremiah,

therefore, looks entirely to the captives for the future of Judah and says in the name of Yahweh,

I will set mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them and not pull them down; and I will plant them and not pluck them up. And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am Yahweh: and they shall be my people and I will be their God; for they shall return unto me with their whole heart. (*Jer.* 24: 6, 7)

But how long before this happy day of return? That was the question among the prophets of Jerusalem. There was a certain Hananiah who, one day, stepped forward to Jeremiah in the temple court and said,

Within two full years . . . I will bring again to this place . . . all the captives of Judah, that went to Babylon, saith Yahweh; for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon. Then the prophet Jeremiah said, "Amen: Yahweh do so." (*Jer.* 28: 3-6)

At this time Jeremiah was wearing a yoke about his neck as a sign that it was Yahweh's will for Judah to wear the yoke of Babylon for a time. (*Jer.* 27: 2)

Then Hananiah the prophet took the yoke from off the prophet Jeremiah's neck, and brake it. And Hananiah spake in the presence of all the people, saying, thus saith Yahweh: Even so will I break the yoke of Nebuchadrezzar. (*Jer.* 28: 10, 11)

Jeremiah seems to have slipped quietly out of the crowd, but soon he returned, wearing an iron yoke, and standing before Hananiah said,

“Thou hast broken the yokes of wood; but thou shalt make in their stead yokes of iron. Hear now, Hananiah; Yahweh hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie.” (*Jer.* 28:13-15)

Thus Jeremiah was compelled to do battle with false prophets who held out groundless hopes to the people. On one occasion he said to one of these prophets,

What is the straw to the wheat? saith Yahweh. Is not my word like as fire? and like a hammer that beateth the rock in pieces? . . . Behold I am against the prophets, saith Yahweh, that use their tongues, and say, He saith. . . . Yet I sent them not, nor commanded them; Neither shall they profit this people at all. (*Jer.* 23: 28-32)

That gives us the difference between a true and a false prophet. The true, speaks the words that are profitable to the people, the false, the words that may be pleasant but are not true. Jeremiah is one of Judah's great heroes for he stood alone for ten years in the falling city declaring the truth to the light-headed people, the false prophets, and the weakling king.

When Jeremiah warned King Zedekiah that the Babylonians would return and destroy Jerusalem the king put him in prison in the “court of the

guard" in the King's house. (*Jer.* 32:2-5) Once the king secretly asked Jeremiah, "Is there any word from Yahweh?" And Jeremiah answered, "There is. Thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon." (*Jer.* 37:17)

Back to prison Jeremiah went for thus speaking the truth to the king. And when the princes begged the king to put Jeremiah to death he offered no objection.

Then took they Jeremiah and cast him into the cistern . . . and they let down Jeremiah with cords. And in the cistern there was no water, but mire; and Jeremiah sank in the mire. (*Jer.* 38: 6)

We have seen that Jeremiah had some faithful friends. One of these was a black man, an Ethiopian. His name, Ebed-melech, means servant of the king. He could not bear to see Jeremiah die in that filthy dungeon. So he ran to the king, who became frightened and ordered him to take some men to help get Jeremiah out.

So Ebed-melech took the men with him, and went into the house of the king under the treasury, and took thence old cast clouts and old rotten rags, and let them down by cords into the dungeon to Jeremiah. And Ebed-melech the Ethiopian said unto Jeremiah,

Put now these old cast clouts and rotten rags under thine armholes under the cords. And Jeremiah did so. So they drew up Jeremiah with the cords and took him up out of the dungeon: and Jeremiah remained in the court of the guards. (*Jer.* 38:11-13)

But Jeremiah, though cruelly dragged about and shut up in prison, is no longer a gloomy discouraged prophet, for he sees continually the new Judah that will come out of this terrible experience. One day his uncle's son came to ask him to buy his field. At first he was astonished at the idea of buying land in a place made desolate by invading armies. Then he seemed to hear the voice of Yahweh speaking to him,

Behold, I am Yahweh, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for me? Fields shall be bought in this land, whereof ye say, It is desolate, without man or beast. For thus saith Yahweh: Like as I have brought all the great evil upon this people, so will I bring upon them all the good I have promised them. (*Jer.* 32: 42)

The greatest words that Jeremiah spoke were those concerning the new covenant. You remember that all Israel had made a sacred covenant with Yahweh long ago in the desert; now that covenant has been broken and a new one must come:

THE NEW COVENANT

Behold, the days come, saith Yahweh, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was a husband unto them, saith Yahweh.

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith Yahweh; I will

put my law in their inward parts, and in their hearts will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people: and they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know Yahweh: For they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith Yahweh: For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more. (*Jer.* 31: 31-34)

What magic method is this of writing on the heart? If the law can be written on the heart or on the mind of the people, then they will keep it because they want to. The old covenant was not in the people's hearts, and when finally it was written in a book, they did not keep it.

Because Jeremiah, ever since he was a boy in his father's house, "knew Yahweh" and talked with him, he was sure that all the people of Judah could talk with Yahweh even though they were in a far-away land.

When Jeremiah gave to the people who were going off to Babylon the idea that they could "know Yahweh" even though they were away from their temple, he did the finest thing for them that he could. He wrote that idea on their minds; and with that idea within them they could be true to Yahweh in a strange land, and they could become the new Judah.

Jeremiah is sometimes regarded as the greatest of the Hebrew prophets because he gave to the Hebrew nation a great idea which no enemy could destroy! He thus made it possible for the Hebrew

people to live as Hebrews though their country was ruined. Jeremiah is great because he found out for himself the greatest ideas, suffered most for them, and succeeded in getting them into the minds of the people.

CHAPTER XXV

EZEKIEL

Among the people marched off to Babylon was a young priest named Ezekiel. After the long journey across the desert he found himself "among the captives by the river Chebar." (*Ezek.* 1:1) The Babylonian Empire lay between the two great rivers and the land there was irrigated and kept fertile by canals. The river Chebar was one of these canals. It was probably near the city of Nippur. A tablet has been found there containing the name Ka-ba-ru. Perhaps Ezekiel's whole family and some of their friends were put by this canal to help work on the land.

One day Ezekiel saw a great storm cloud rolling up into the sky from the north. Perhaps he was out in the fields at work. In those lands where it did not often rain people were especially glad to see storm clouds. Ezekiel says,

I looked, and, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, a great cloud, with a fire infolding itself, and a brightness round about it, and out of the midst thereof as the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire. (*Ezek.* 1:4)

This is not unlike the brilliant storm clouds which one can sometimes see in any land, especially at

sunset. To Ezekiel the clouds became more than clouds, however, by the power of the thought within him. Why had the terrible calamity come upon his nation? Why should he be toiling here in exile when at home in Jerusalem he might have been a priest of Yahweh? What did Yahweh wish him to do now? As Ezekiel turned over such questions in his mind the clouds seemed to take on the shape of "four living creatures." Like the cherubim in the temple at Jerusalem, not unlike the strange figures in the Babylonian temples, the clouds looked. To Ezekiel they meant that the great Power of the World was about to speak to him. He fell upon his face and out of the cloud he seemed to hear a great voice:

Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee. And the Spirit entered into me when he spake unto me and set me upon my feet; and I heard him that spake unto me. And he said unto me, Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel: They and their fathers have transgressed against me. And the children are impudent and stiffhearted; I do send thee unto them: and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith Yahweh God. (*Ezek.* 2: 1-4)

Ah, then it was indeed because Judah had sinned against Yahweh that this calamity had come upon them. How often the boy Ezekiel had heard the old prophet Jeremiah declare Judah's wickedness and coming captivity! Now his words had come true. But the people of Judah were "impudent and

stiffhearted''; they did not like to think they deserved this captivity. The Voice from the cloud said further to Ezekiel:

But thou, Son of man, hear what I say unto thee; Be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house: open thy mouth, and eat that I give thee. And when I looked, behold, an hand was put forth unto me; and, lo, a roll of a book was therein; and he spread it before me; and it was written within and without: and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe, and he said unto me, Son of man, eat that thou findest; eat this roll, and go, speak unto the house of Israel. So I opened my mouth and he caused me to eat the roll. (*Ezek.* 2: 8-3: 2)

Why eat a book? He means that every word of that book must be understood. No actual roll is here, but a message to Judah long enough to fill a book, and full of woe. What is the woeful message to Judah? The only way to find out is to watch Ezekiel. First he goes, perhaps from his place of work, to the group of captives that he is nearest.

Then I came to them of the captivity at Tel-abib, that dwelleth by the river Chebar, and to where they dwell; and I sat there astonished among them seven days. (*Ezek.* 3: 15)

It was not that he did not know what to say but that he could not get courage to say it. But Yahweh spoke to him as he sat upon the ground and at last he found a way to make known the woeful message of the book. It was a boy's way of acting things

out. It seemed to him that the Voice told him how, thus:

Thou also, Son of man, take thee a tile, and lay it before thee, and portray upon it a city, even Jerusalem. And lay siege against it, and build forts against it, and cast a mound against it; set camps also against it, and plant battering-rams against it round about. And take thou unto thee an iron pan, and set it for a wall of iron between thee and the city: and set thy face toward it, and it shall be besieged, and thou shalt lay siege against it. This shall be a sign to the house of Israel. Moreover, lie thou upon thy left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it. (*Ezek. 4:1-4*)

What did the captives of Tel-abib think of such strange actions? First, some one would say that Ezekiel had stopped working and was sitting looking as if he had some terrible thing to tell. Then the boys and girls, perhaps, would spread the news that he had taken a tablet and set it up and drawn the city of Jerusalem upon it. Then he began making war upon this city which he had set up in the sand. Then next he had built a fort, perhaps with a few bricks buried in the sand. He set up a mound on which he put something like a battering ram to throw stones against the walls. He made trenches for the enemies of the city to hold during the siege. Then he took a flat griddle and, getting behind it, acted as though he were directing the siege of the city. It would be strange if by this time Ezekiel was not surrounded by a crowd. At least the boys

and girls were there watching every move of the game. Perhaps the older people would hurry by when they saw that this game was not for fun but to tell them that their holy city must be destroyed. Soon the whole colony of captives would know that Ezekiel was preaching to them by his little drama this message: Jerusalem must be destroyed; enter into your life as captives and make the best of it; repent of your sins. This, then, was the message in the book that Ezekiel had "eaten." It was his sad duty to destroy the hope of return to Jerusalem by any of these captives, so that they would face their sins and repent. In so many ways did Ezekiel tell the people that their captivity was a punishment for their sins that at last some of them answered him. This is what they said:

The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge. (*Ezek.* 18: 2)

By this they mean that they were suffering not for their own sins but for those of the wicked kings of Israel, and other unjust ones of their ancestors. To this Ezekiel replied in the strongest language:

As I live, saith Yahweh God. . . . Behold all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine; the soul that sinneth, it shall die. (*Ezek.* 18: 3, 4 & *Jer.* 31: 29)

It is easy to blame other people for one's troubles and especially in those days did sons blame their

fathers as heads of the family. Although Jeremiah was proclaiming it in Jerusalem, Ezekiel was the first to lay great emphasis upon individual responsibility. Each soul stands alone in the sight of God.

The soul that sinneth it shall die: the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. (*Ezek.* 18: 20)

But this must have made the captives even more discouraged. What good is it to be proved wicked and so the cause of your own troubles? Just this, that you can then change your doings and so get rid of your troubles. This was what Ezekiel wanted his brother captives to do. He assured them that Yahweh was not pleased that the Judean nation was now almost completely destroyed; he was sending his prophets to them to urge them to rise up and live, even though their nation seemed dead and buried.

I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith Yahweh God. Return ye, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions wherein ye have transgressed; and make you a new and an ardent spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith Yahweh God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live. (*Ezek.* 18: 30-32)

CHAPTER XXVI

THE HOLY CITY IS DESTROYED

What was happening in Jerusalem during the days that the exiles in captivity were mournfully longing for their homes but were being told by Ezekiel that they would never see them? Jeremiah was still there telling the Jerusalemites that there would be some hope for them if they would repent. And Zedekiah, the king of Jerusalem, did at first lead the people in an attempt to make some things right. They read in their old Law Book that after six years all Hebrew slaves should be set free, and king and people decided to free their slaves. At a public gathering the people made a covenant and the king proclaimed liberty to the slaves.

It was a strange ceremony by which they pledged themselves to make their slaves free. They cut a calf into two pieces and in the temple marched between the parts, vowing,

To proclaim liberty, every man to his brother, and every man to his neighbor. (*Jer.* 34: 17)

But soon people forgot their fear of being carried off to Babylon; they thought they were foolish to have repented and to have tried to do right. They went after the people that they had made free and

forced them back into slavery. This brought Jeremiah forward with a message from Yahweh:

Ye turned and profaned my name, and caused every man his servant, and every man his hand-maid, whom ye had let go free at their pleasure, to return; and ye brought them into subjection, to be unto you for servants and for hand-maids. Therefore thus saith Yahweh: . . . Zedekiah, king of Judah, and his princes will I give into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life, and into the hand of the king of Babylon's army, which are gone up from you. Behold, I will command, saith Yahweh, and cause them to return to this city; and they shall fight against it, and take it, and burn it with fire. (*Jer.* 34:16-22)

Thus what Ezekiel was preaching in Babylon to the captives, Jeremiah had been proclaiming for ten years in Jerusalem to those who were left, the necessary destruction of the Holy City because of the sins of the people. As we have seen (*Chap.* XXIV) this had kept Jeremiah in prison a great deal of the time receiving "daily a loaf of bread out of the baker's street, until all the bread in the city was spent." (*Jer.* 37:21). On this second coming of Nebuchadrezzar against Jerusalem the city was besieged for a year and a half. "The famine was sore in the city, so that there was no bread for the people of the land." (*II Kings* 25:3)

At last a breach was made in the city wall and the Babylonian soldiers came rushing in. Now the princes of Babylon sat in the gate as the rulers of the city.

When Zedekiah the king of Judah and all the men of war saw them, then they fled, and went forth out of the city by' night, by the way of the king's garden . . . but the army of the Chaldeans pursued after them. (*Jer.* 39: 4, 5)

Strange to say, the Babylonian captain of the guard took Jeremiah out of prison and said to him:

Behold I loose thee this day from the chains which are upon thine hand. If it seem good unto thee to come with me unto Babylon, come, and I will look well unto thee; but if it seem ill unto thee to come with me into Babylon, forbear: behold, all the land is before thee; whither it seemeth good and convenient unto thee to go, thither go. (*Jer.* 40: 4, 5)

But Jeremiah had no mind to receive favors from the enemies of Judah; he had not declared that Judah should fall before the Babylonians because of any desire to please Nebuchadrezzar or his captains. The only thing that could have made Jeremiah wish to go to Babylon was his belief that the future of Judah rested with the captives. He had written letters to the captives expressing his hope. (See *Jer.* 29) Why did he not now go to Babylon to help the captives fulfill his hope? Perhaps because he knew that Ezekiel was there, or perhaps it was because he saw that the poor people left in Judah needed him. He stayed with the people and saw the terrible destruction of the Holy City and Temple.

Nebuzar-adan burnt the house of Yahweh, and the king's house; and all the houses of Jerusalem, even every great

house burnt he with fire, and all the army of the Chaldeans that were with the captain of the guard brake down the walls of Jerusalem round about. And the pillars of brass that were in the house of Yahweh, and the bases and the brazen sea that were in the house of Yahweh, did the Chaldeans break in pieces, and carried the brass of them to Babylon. And the pots, and the shovels, and the snuffers, and the spoons, and all the vessels of brass wherewith they ministered, took they away. (*II Kings* 25:8-14)

All these sacred things the people had always been afraid even to touch. How strange and unbelievable it must have been to see these ancient temple pillars broken up by unclean hands! How their hearts must have quaked with fear to see the walls smoke and flame! The Holy of Holies, the dwelling-place of Yahweh guarded by the great-winged cherubim—how could it be destroyed? Had not Isaiah said it could not be? But Jeremiah was now saying it must perish and that Yahweh could be worshiped without the temple!

Poor bewildered people, which way should they turn? Some gave themselves up at once to the Chaldeans. Some tried to hide in the hills, some started for Egypt. News came that the fleeing king had been caught and taken to the headquarters of Nebuchadrezzar's army.

They slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him in fetters, and carried him to Babylon. (*II Kings* 25:7)

But in spite of his cruelty to Zedekiah, the Baby-

lonian monarch appointed as governor an excellent young man, Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, one of Jeremiah's friends.

Then went Jeremiah unto Gedaliah, the son of Ahikam, to Mizpah and dwelt with him among the people that were left in the land. (*Jer.* 40:6)

It is possible that Jeremiah and this new governor of Judah might have helped the poor people left in the land to a fairly comfortable life, but in war and disorder bad people are likely to get power. So it happened that an assassin named Ishmael killed Gedaliah and some of his friends and threw their bodies into a pit. This filled many people with fear so that they fled to Egypt. They asked Jeremiah's advice, and he told them that the message of Yahweh to them was,

If ye will still abide in this land, then will I build you, and not pull you down, and I will plant you, and not pluck you up. (*Jer.* 42:10)

This made the people furiously angry. Could they endure any more? No, they would give up Judah and Yahweh, and flee to Egypt where they would not "have hunger of bread." (*Jer.* 42:14) They seized Jeremiah and dragged him off to Egypt too. (*Jer.* 43:6) Perhaps they thought they would prevent the punishment of Yahweh from falling too heavily upon them if they had his prophet with them. But they did not listen to the words of Jeremiah in Egypt and when he reproved them for worshipping

the "Queen of Heaven" (*Jer.* 44:17) instead of Yahweh they were furious with rage. An old story says that they stoned the old prophet to death. This is not unlikely since his whole life is the story of a man who loved and lived for the people when they did not understand him and even when they treated him cruelly. Jeremiah once pictured Yahweh like a father saying to rebellious Judah, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." (*Jer.* 31:3)

So it was with Jeremiah himself—he loved Judah to the last and said that this seeming destruction of the nation should not be the end. This great soul died a martyr to the desire to keep the soul of Judah alive. In later years people came to know how much he had done for Judah and a poet wrote a wonderful poem which may well be applied to Jeremiah saying,

He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities. (*Isa.* 53:5)

To the sorrowful captives in far-away Babylon, and to Ezekiel sitting speechless with grief came one day a dusty, weary traveler. He was one who had "escaped out of Jerusalem" and perhaps hoped to find his family among the captives. His words as he probably fell down with grief and exhaustion were, "The city is smitten." (*Ezek.* 33:21)

One can almost hear the moaning sound of the mourners that must have gone up all over the section of the city where the captives lived. No captors could keep them from grief over the fall of their be-

loved Holy City. Judah's sins had brought her to this terrible moment when all that she held most sacred seemed lost. A poem was written by some one who had seen the destruction of Jerusalem. Let us see how the people felt:

A Lamentation

How hath Yahweh covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger!

He hath cast down from heaven unto the earth the beauty of Israel,

And hath not remembered his foot-stool in the day of his anger.

He hath destroyed his place of assembly:

Yahweh hath caused solemn assembly and sabbath to be forgotten in Zion,

And hath despised in the indignation of his anger the king and the priest.

Yahweh hath cast off his altar, he hath abhorred his sanctuary.

(*Lam.* 2: 1-7)

Remembering the terrible days of the famine during the siege of Jerusalem the poet is filled with grief,

Because the young children and the sucklings swoon in the streets of the city.

They say to their mothers, Where is corn and wine?

When they swoon as the wounded in the streets of the city,
When their soul is poured out in their mother's bosom.

What shall I testify unto thee? What shall I liken to thee, O daughter of Jerusalem? . . .

Is this the city that man called the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth?

(*Lam.* 2: 11-15)

In another poem the author shows that he fully understands that Yahweh has not willingly brought sorrow upon his holy people but it has come because they did not remain holy.

It is because of the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests,

That have shed the blood of the just in the midst of her,
They wander as blind men in the streets, they are polluted with blood,

So that men cannot touch their garments.

(*Lam.* 4: 13, 14)

CHAPTER XXVII

JUDAH GOES TO SCHOOL IN CAPTIVITY

Who would have thought that the dismal young prophet Ezekiel would have been the one to rouse his people to actual interest in a new commonwealth for Judah? Some of the people must have almost hated him for always talking to them about their sins and the destruction of Jerusalem. When the blow came and the Holy City was no more, they would certainly have turned away from Ezekiel and from all hope had he not spoken to them with new words. But then there came to Ezekiel another vision which he passed on to the people:

THE VISION OF THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES

The hand of Yahweh was upon me, and he carried me out—and set me down in the valley; and it was full of bones; . . . and lo, they were very dry.

VOICE OF YAHWEH: Son of Man, can these bones live?

EZEKIEL: O Yahweh God, thou knowest.

VOICE OF YAHWEH: Prophesy over these bones and say unto them,

O ye dry bones, hear the word of Yahweh,

Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live.

So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold an earthquake, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. . . .

I beheld, and lo, there were sinews upon them, and flesh came up, and skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them.

VOICE OF YAHWEH: Prophecy unto the wind, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith Yahweh God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.

So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army.

VOICE OF YAHWEH: Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come out of your graves; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. And I will put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I will place you in your own land: and ye shall know that I Yahweh have spoken it, and performed it, saith Yahweh. (*Ezek.* 37:1-14.)

Life once more after the burial in a strange land and the destruction of one's home? No wonder that this new message brought the people again crowding round Ezekiel. If dry bones could be brought to life then indeed Judah might by the power of the breath of God come to life. A new spirit went through the colony of captives; the bowed heads were raised and a new light came into many eyes. The hopes of Jeremiah were actually fulfilled as his words were repeated by Ezekiel and taken up by the people:

A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to

walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. (*Ezek.* 36: 26, 27. Compare *Jer.* 32: 39)

To walk in the statutes of the law, that is what Ezekiel laid upon the newly encouraged people. Had not all their troubles come from their sins? Then the way to have happiness in the future will be to do Yahweh's will. To inspire the people with this idea Ezekiel drew a picture of the perfect community as it should be built in Jerusalem in the future.

In a vision he saw the temple of the future not only restored but enlarged and beautified. There were more courts, and they were magnificently decorated with cherubim and palm-trees. But the important new thing in Ezekiel's dream-temple was that it should shut out all uncleanness. To make this sure he shut the people out of the inner court where they used to come to see the entrance to the Holy of Holies when the priests went in for them. In the new temple the people must never go farther than an outer court. A thick wall shut them out and another wall outside the temple shut out all Gentiles. Priests' houses were to be built around the temple to protect it and great gates had special guards.

Another change Ezekiel proposed was that only priests of the line of Zadok (as he himself was) should act as priests in the new temple. The Levites were to become temple servants. This would make it possible never to allow any

outsider in even to clean the floors of the temple. All this is a plan, you see, for keeping the temple pure, but notice what kind of purity it is—ceremonial purity. That is, Ezekiel is not thinking here so much about whether a man is good or wicked as whether he is a priest or an ordinary man. He seems to think that an ordinary man would make the Holy Place unclean when a priest would not. Of course it actually depends upon whether the person is wicked or not. But Ezekiel here gives a turn to Judah's thinking that changes the whole of Judah's history. See how important is thinking! Ezekiel is like the teacher in a school who sets all his pupils to work upon certain problems and leads them along to think just as he does.

Now Ezekiel sets all the captives to studying how they can become holy so as to live in the Judean community of the future. But he makes them think especially about what they shall do to be ceremonially holy, for instance, just how to keep the Sabbath. Is it right to light a fire and cook one's breakfast on the Sabbath? Is it right to take a journey? Many such questions were talked about by Ezekiel and by young men who became his disciples. They gathered all the copies of the law that had been brought from Jerusalem to see what it said, and they began making notes about what Ezekiel and other teachers said the law meant.

Certainly it is fine to see the exiles forming these little schools and studying every minute they can get away from their work. But we can't help being

sorry that Ezekiel led them to think so much about keeping certain rules and ceremonies. Because holiness, the prophets had long taught, is a matter of the heart, not of keeping rules about how to wash the hands. Ezekiel cared about the heart, too, and he set people to reading the old prophets, which was fine. Perhaps no one had collected the writings of the prophets before, but now they searched everywhere and got all the rolls and parts of rolls and pieced them together into books of the prophets so that people could study them. Of course it was on the Sabbath day that people had the most time to study. So many people were interested that they needed houses in which to keep their books. So it came about that there were special houses for the study of the holy writings. Afterward, in Palestine, these houses were called synagogues, which name means places for the people to come together. A visitor to Palestine would have seen an earnest, studious people. They would get together every Sabbath, and read and learn by heart some part of the law or prophets. The whole people went to school to the teachers of the holy books.

What books did they have to study? They had only a few of those making up the Old Testament. These seem to have been:

- (1) *The Book of the Covenant* (Ex. 20: 22-23: 19)
- (2) The Old Story-Books now called J. and E.
- (3) *Amos*, except the end: Ch. 9: 11-15.
- (4) *Hosea*—parts of the book.
- (5) *Micah* (Chs. 1-3)

(6) The Book found in the Temple. *Deut.* 12-26, 28.

(7) Parts of *Judges* and *Kings*.

(8) *Isaiah*. Chs. 1-39 in part.

(9) *Jeremiah*—most of the book as it had been put together by Baruch.

Now for the first time these books were brought together. But the teachers who used them were not only collectors of the old sacred books, they were editors and re-writers. For instance, some one added the end to the book of *Amos*. This old prophet had announced the destruction of Israel. His words had proved true, O, how sadly true for both Israel and Judah. But now a new hope had come;—Israel and Judah are certainly to be restored sometime. Every reader of *Amos* ought to know that the time had come when his woes are to be replaced by blessings. Therefore they added to his prophesy these words:

In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old. (*Amos* 9:11)

Many such additions were made to the prophets; but especially these editors of the old books worked on the Law Book because they wanted the people to follow the law carefully. So they enlarged the book of instruction that Hilkiah had found in the temple making it into our book of *Deuteronomy*, and they made a little code of Holiness to give directions

about the clean and the unclean. They also re-wrote the story of Israel and Judah as contained in parts of *Judges* and *Kings*. They wanted to point out which kings of Israel were good and kept the law; they wanted to show that those who kept the law prospered and those who did not had a hard time. And one strange idea that the people of the exile got was this,—that the people long ago were good and most of the people of later times, bad. With this idea in mind they re-wrote the old story-books J. and E. and pieced the two together showing what splendid followers of Yahweh the old Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were. Then because these fathers of Israel were thought to be so pleasing to Yahweh, some people wrote a whole new story of the entrance into Canaan,—the book of *Joshua*. Here Joshua appears as a triumphant hero always conquering the Canaanites, whereas the book of *Judges* shows that the conquest of Canaan was most difficult, and that the Israelites were often defeated.

All this means that the Judean exiles were idealists, that is, they believed that their most beautiful hopes could come true and were willing to work for them. They would not give up their beloved Judah though all her outer riches were destroyed. During the exile they developed their inner riches,—their ideals of the perfect law, the perfect community, the perfect worship. These things no invading army, no slave-drivers could take away from them. Thus Judah lived in exile and studied and prepared for the day of freedom.

CHAPTER XXVIII

JUDAH A LIGHT OF THE NATIONS

To the captives of Babylon, bound to their work by day and bowed over their holy books by night, there came again the voice of a prophet:

Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God.
Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her,
That her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is
 pardoned,
For she hath received from Yahweh's hand double for all
 her sins.

(*Isa.* 40: 1, 2)

What? Judah's debt for her sins paid? Hard, indeed, it had been for the proud princes and people of Judah to be willing to say that they deserved their captivity. But Jeremiah and Ezekiel had helped them to see it, and now what joy to hear words of comfort from one who spoke again in the name of Yahweh! Nor was this speaker some one far away, but one of their own number, one who knew what life in a strange land meant. Perhaps he could remember, when a boy, seeing and hearing Ezekiel teaching the people, but his chief inspiration came out of the books of the prophets, especially Jeremiah. No name has remained attached to this

man, but that he was a real man in Babylon is shown by the fact that he had a definite program beginning at Babylôn which he put into these words:

Hark! there is a cry: Clear ye in the wilderness the way
of Yahweh;
Make plain in the desert a highway for our God,
Let every mountain and hill sink down, and every valley
be uplifted,
And let the steep ground become level, and the rough
country plain!
And the glory of Yahweh will be revealed,
And all flesh shall see it together,
For the mouth of Yahweh has spoken it.

(*Isa. 40: 3-5*)

Now is the time to prepare for a journey from Babylon to Jerusalem across the desert! (See map.) The time is at hand when the words of Jeremiah and Ezekiel shall be fulfilled by a return to Judah. How did this man dare utter such words? How could he know that affairs in Babylon were to change? Because, like Isaiah and the other prophets, he not only cherished in his heart great hopes but he looked out on the world to see when there was any chance of fulfillment. This young man did not keep his eyes on his holy books only nor even on the affairs of the people close around him. He knew what was going on among the great empires of the world. He was watching the career of a young man named Cyrus, belonging to a small

country east of Babylon. In a few years Cyrus had organized the Mede-Persian empire, then started out to make conquest of the rest of the world.

Perhaps Cyrus did not attract the attention of the world until he overthrew Croesus at Sardis. For years treasures had been piling up in this city, well fortified behind its mountains. Croesus was the richest man in the world; he was proud and felt sure of his power. When a Greek prophetess at Delphi told him that if he went to war he would "destroy a mighty empire" it never occurred to him that it might be his own. But soon Cyrus besieged his capital, took the vast treasures of Sardis, and led Croesus away captive. (See *Herodotus* 1:73-84) Perhaps it was when Cyrus had startled the world with this deed that our prophet of the exile began to speak of him thus:

Who was it that roused up from the East,
Him on whose steps attends victory,
That brings up before him people,
And into kings strikes a terror?
His sword makes them like dust,
His bow like driven stubble;
He pursues them, passes on in safety;
The path with his feet he does not tread.

(*Isa.* 41: 2, 3)

More remarkable still, this Judean prophet actually names Cyrus as the one anointed by Yahweh to carry out his purposes.

I am Yahweh . . . that saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying of Jerusalem; She shall be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid. Thus saith Yahweh to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him, and I will loose the loins of kings; to open the doors before him, and the gates shall not be shut; I will go before thee, and make the rugged places plain: I will break in pieces the doors of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron. (*Isa.* 44:24-28; 45:1, 2)

To the "hundred gated Babylon" this conqueror will come. When he has established his power he will be the long awaited deliverer of Judah. The prophet does not mean to imply that Cyrus ever heard of this Yahweh who is leading him to free the people. He knows that Cyrus worships his own gods. It is interesting that we have a clay cylinder from the time of Cyrus, telling how Marduk the chief god of Babylon helped him take the city:

"Marduk, the Lord, the protector of his people, looked with joy upon his (Cyrus's) beneficent deeds and upright heart. He commanded his (Cyrus's) march to his own (Marduk's) city Babylon, caused him to take the road to Tintir (Babylon). Like a friend and helper he marched by his side."

"I, Cyrus, king of hosts, the eternal seed of royalty whose kingdom Bel and Nebo love, whose rule they longed for to their heart's joy,—I made my entry into Babylon in peace." (From the "Clay Cylinder." See *Century Bible*, Isaiah Vol. II, p. 342)

Cyrus believed that all gods were on his side and

he was ready to worship any of them. Far different was the thought of the prophet of Judah. To him there is but One God in the world:

I am Yahweh, there is none else; besides me there is no God: I will gird thee, though thou hast not known me: that they may know from the rising sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me: I am Yahweh, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace and create evil; I am Yahweh. (*Isa.* 45: 5-7)

One God over the whole earth—this is one of the great ideas of this prophet of the exile. By whatever name men may call him, whether they know of him at all or not, there is but one God. Idols, what are they?

To whom will ye liken God,
And what sort of image place beside him?
An image! a craftsman has cast it,
And a goldsmith overlays it with gold.

(*Isa.* 40: 18, 19)

How absurd it is to make an image and then walk in a procession and adore it! Such gods are nothing and are not to be considered beside him who is the "Creator of the ends of the earth." (*Isa.* 40: 28)

But why does this God of the whole world care so much for poor little Judah? Why should he lead a conqueror like Cyrus to free the little slave nation? Because Judah is to be a "Servant" to the world! Here we have an entirely new idea so magnificent

that it is not easy to understand it fully. This new idea of the greatness of service is set forth in four short poems. The first one is as follows:

Yahweh's Servant

Behold, my servant, whom I uphold;
My chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my spirit upon him,
He will set forth the law to the nations.

He will not cry aloud, nor roar as a lion,
Nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets.
A cracked reed he will not break
And a dim burning wick he will not quench.

Faithfully he will set forth the law;
He will not burn dimly nor be crushed in spirit,
Till he have set the law in the earth,
And for his instruction the far countries wait.

(*Isa. 42: 1-4*)

Here it is plain that the Servant is one who is to carry great good to the whole world. This is stated still more clearly in a verse from one of the other poems:

It is too light a thing to raise up the tribes of Jacob,
And to restore the preserved of Israel;
So I set thee as a light of the nations.
That my deliverance may be to the end of the earth.

(*Isa. 49: 6*)

The new idea of this prophet is, then, that Judah is to be a "Light of the Nations."

They had been punished in the captivity for their sins, but why? Not merely for their own sake but to teach them things that they might teach to the whole world. The darkness of their sufferings was for the light of the world. What kind of light? The light of the One God who cares for all the world. During a thousand years the people of Judah had come to think that Yahweh cared for them, but the captivity led them to see that he cares also for all peoples and has especially prepared Judah to be a servant to all people, to teach them about God.

Is it not wonderful that this prophet of the exile knows and rejoices in Cyrus the conqueror, yet does not desire to see Judah a conqueror? Who in the world ever before thought it a greater thing to be a servant than a conqueror? Indeed, this is the beginning of Judah's great work for other nations. Up to this time the Hebrews have been like children getting their training in the home and in school but now Judah has grown to be a man with great ideas to give the world and is writing and speaking these ideas. To do this is far greater than to conquer all the richest cities in the world and to take all their treasures. To have discovered truth to give to others, is not this true wealth and true conquest?

CHAPTER XXIX

THE "REMNANT" REBUILDS THE TEMPLE

Judah the Servant of the world was an idea too high for all the people in captivity. There were, of course, all kinds of people among them, some who would sacrifice everything for the right, some who were content to let things drift. Now, to the mind of the Prophet of the Exile, all Judah should become this Servant carrying light to the world. But as he preached he found some who did not see much in this idea. To such he spoke sharply to rouse them:

Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see. Who is blind, but my Servant? Or deaf, as my messenger that I send? Who is blind as he that is at peace with me, and blind as Yahweh's servant? (*Isa.* 42:18, 19)

This blindness of part of the people of Judah to their mission caused the Prophet to see that the true Servant of Yahweh was the part of Judah that did see and understand, those whom Isaiah had called The Holy Remnant. This "Remnant" had actually existed ever since the days of Isaiah. They had treasured the prophetic writings and ideals. They were young men who became disciples to the prophets, adopted their ideas and actually kept them from

being lost and destroyed. At the time of the Exile Jeremiah and his group of disciples formed the Holy Remnant. Although Jeremiah did not go to Babylon his disciples and his ideas did. The Prophet of the Exile also was one of this Holy Remnant and no doubt had disciples. In his book (*Isaiah* 40-55) he gives us a picture of this Holy Remnant as despised and rejected by his blind brothers and all the world for their sake. Those who had tortured him at last came to see that it was for their sins that he suffered. The poem seems almost to be speaking of an individual. Perhaps the author is thinking of Jeremiah who was tortured by his own people for their sake, and who here stands as a representative of all the Holy Remnant. The main part of the poem is as follows:

The Suffering Servant

He was despised and rejected of men;
A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief:
And we hid, as it were, our faces from him;
He was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he hath borne our griefs,
And carried our sorrows:
Yet we did esteem him, stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.

But he was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities:
The chastisement of our peace was upon him,
And with his stripes we are healed.

All we, like sheep, have gone astray;
We have turned every one to his own way;
And 'Yahweh hath laid on him
The iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
Yet he opened not his mouth:
He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter,
And as a sheep before her shearers, is dumb.

He was taken from prison, and from judgment:
And who shall declare his generation?
For he was cut off out of the land of the living:
For the transgression of my people was he stricken.
(*Isaiah 53: 3-8*)

The nobility of giving one's life for others is what the writer of this poem glorifies. This Jeremiah the prophet had done, and his life was an example to those who were sacrificing much for Judah in captivity.

In the midst of Babylon it required some sacrifice to be true to Judah. Indeed, when Cyrus, the conqueror of Babylon, proclaimed that various peoples might return to their home lands there were not so many ready to return to Jerusalem as one would suppose. They had found ways to have such comforts as they could not hope to have for a long time back in ruined Jerusalem. Hence it is probable that only a few prepared to take the long hard journey across the desert. Some thought, no doubt, that they would do better to stay in Babylon and give

food and provisions to those who went back to the Holy City.

Our history concerning the “Return” is not clear in the old records, but probably a small company returned to Jerusalem in the year 537 B. C. Joshua, the High Priest, led the “Remnant” and there went with him a young prince named Zerubbabel, of the House of David. Of the few hundred people who went along, some would remember Jerusalem as it was but more would be waiting to get their first glimpse of holy Mount Zion.

Their great desire would naturally be to rebuild the temple, and they probably made a beginning soon after arriving. But the difficulty of obtaining both materials and workers, was very great and little was actually accomplished for some years. People were so busy getting houses built for themselves that the temple remained unbuilt.

It was not until two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, began to shame the people that they rose up and set to work in earnest on the temple. “Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?” cried Haggai. “Be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith Yahweh; and be strong, O Joshua, the High Priest, and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith Yahweh, and work; for I am with you.” (*Hag.* 2:4)

As the people went to work they began to look toward Zerubbabel as their king and to dream that he would restore the glory of the old days. Zechariah is probably thinking of him when he called some

one "my servant the Branch" (*Zech.* 3:8) This young prince of the House of David seemed like the new branch that comes forth from old roots in the spring time. Might not he be the one through whom the nation should again grow up? They even talked of crowns of silver and gold. (*Zech.* 6:11-15) But it is uncertain whether they dared to crown him king, since it might be considered treason by Darius who had now become their overlord after the death of Cyrus.

But at last the temple was finished and the little group in Jerusalem was filled with joy. Out of this joy came many songs for the new temple which were then for the first time introduced into the service. Poets arose among the people, and musicians set their words to music. Some of these songs have been preserved in our book of the Psalms, which began to be collected at this time.

Here, then, is the purified Judah, small and hard pressed by poverty; yet they are the Holy Remnant who will preserve the literature and the great principles of Judah till opportunity comes to make them more widely known to the world.

CHAPTER XXX

NEHEMIAH, THE REBUILDER OF JERUSALEM

Arise, shine; for thy light is come,
And the glory of Yahweh is risen upon thee.
The nations shall come to thy light,
And kings to the brightness of thy rising.

(*Isa.* 60: 1, 3)

So proclaimed a prophet in Jerusalem not long after Zerubbabel and his followers succeeded in rebuilding the temple. Now is the important time, he cries, for us not to forget the great ideas of the prophets of the exile, for the prophecies are being fulfilled. Judah, the Servant, now speaks declaring that the time has come when he brings blessings to many.

The Spirit of Yahweh God is upon me;
Because Yahweh hath anointed me to preach good things
unto the meek;
He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captive,
And the opening of the prison to them that are bound;
To proclaim the acceptable year of Yahweh.

(*Isa.* 61: 1, 2)

It is good to see that these splendid ideas of serv-

ice to the world lived in the newly built Jerusalem community although the people were destitute and hard-worked. The temple they had built was a poor affair beside the temple of Solomon which some could remember. These temple builders had not gold and silver in abundance but they had the glory of great ideas, and this made the temple again the center of their life.

Sad to say, there is a break in the story here and we do not know what became of Zerubbabel. Was he removed by the Persian over-lord? Did he die? At any rate no more work seems to have been done on the reconstruction of Jerusalem, and when next we can pick up the story of Jerusalem in the book of *Nehemiah* there seems to be no ruler, and disorder reigns everywhere. About a hundred years after Zerubbabel, Nehemiah appears as a new leader for the Jerusalem community. How he came to this place let him tell us in his own words:

The words of Nehemiah. . . . It came to pass, as I was in Shushan the palace, that Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men out of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach; the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire. And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days; and I fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. (*Neh.* 1:1-4)

Nehemiah was cup-bearer to the great Persian king in the palace at Shushan and always, when he lifted up the sparkling goblet to his royal highness, he lifted also a face beaming with cheeriness. But so deeply did he feel sorrow about the report of the bad condition of Jerusalem that one day his face was so sad that the king spoke to him.

KING: Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? This is nothing else but sorrow of heart.

NEHEMIAH: Let the king live forever; why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?

KING: For what dost thou make request?

NEHEMIAH: (*After a moment's prayer*) If it please the king, and if thy servant hast found favor in thy sight, that thou would'st send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it.

KING: (*After a few words with the queen, who has evidently been moved by NEHEMIAH'S words*) For how long shall thy journey be? And when wilt thou return?

NEHEMIAH: If it please the king let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may let me pass through till I come unto Judah.

KING: Go, and I will send with thee captains of the army and horsemen.

NEHEMIAH: (*Bowing low and kissing the hem of the king's garment, then rising*) The hand of my God is good upon me. Farewell. (*Neh. 2: 1-8*)

Nehemiah was a man of action. Immediately he set out for Jerusalem. For three days after his arrival he examined the situation, and then in the night rode around the walls to see the exact con-

dition before he told any one who he was or why he had come. Then he told his brethren of his permit from the king to rebuild the battered walls. Full of joy they replied, "Let us arise and build." (*Neh.* 2: 11-18)

Now there were two wealthy men living outside Jerusalem, named Sanballat and Tobiah, who had long persecuted the little community in Jerusalem. They laughed at the attempts to rebuild the walls, saying,

What do these feeble Jews? Will they fortify themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they make an end in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, seeing they are burned? . . . Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall break down their stone wall. (*Neh.* 4: 2, 3) What is this thing ye do? Will ye rebel against the king? (*Neh.* 2: 19)

This charge of treason could be answered by showing Nehemiah's permit from the king. And the answer to the scornful laughter was this: "The people had a mind to work." (*Neh.* 4: 6)

With determination they were able to accomplish the well-nigh impossible. "Bearers of burdens" carried away the great masses of rubbish, probably in big baskets on their heads. Amazed and angered at the success of the workers in filling up great holes in the wall's foundations, Sanballat and Tobiah determined to attack them. Nehemiah at once organized a plan of defence. A trumpeter was stationed

to watch and a sword was girded on the side of each worker. Some also had spears and Nehemiah announced to all:

“In what place soever ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us; our God shall fight for us.” (*Neh.* 4: 20)

While they were overcoming their outside enemies by this splendid energy and the wall was growing higher every day, there rose a trouble within Jerusalem. One day there was a tumult in the streets because certain rich Jews were trying to collect debts from the people who had been working on the walls without pay. Various voices in the crowd could be heard crying out:

We, our sons and our daughters are many: let us get corn that we may eat and live.

We are mortgaging our fields, and our vineyards, and our houses.

Lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters, to be servants.

Other men have our lands and our fields. (*Neh.* 5: 1-5)

When Nehemiah heard these cries and saw that the rich were not willing to sacrifice for the building of the wall and were even taking away the lands and the children of the poor he was “very angry.” He called the rich nobles together and said to them:

We after our ability have redeemed our brethren, the Jews, that were sold unto the heathen; and would ye even

sell your brethren? Then held they their peace and found never a word. (*Neh.* 5: 8)

These "nobles" were so ashamed of themselves that they promised to restore all they had taken and to charge no more usury. Then Nehemiah, who was undoubtedly wearing a long oriental gown, shook out his lap and said:

So God shake out every man from his house, and from his labor, that performeth not this promise; even thus be he shaken out and emptied. And all the congregation said Amen, and praised Yahweh. (*Neh.* 5:13)

Nehemiah did not merely call upon others to make sacrifices for the upbuilding of the walls, he used his own money to buy every day "one ox and six choice sheep"; also other food for his table to which he invited many who were giving their time to building. (*Neh.* 5:17, 18)

With such a strong efficient man among them it would not be surprising if many of the people wanted him to be their king and probably wondered if he might not be the expected Messiah. A letter which Sanballat sent to Nehemiah accuses him of appointing prophets to preach that he was to be king. This Nehemiah denies and certainly his whole conduct shows that he had no idea of becoming king, which would have been treason to his Persian emperor.

His enemies tried to get Nehemiah to come down

into the plain of Ono for a conference, but he would not fall into their traps. When some one tried to frighten him into thinking that he was about to be captured by his enemies and urged that he flee to the temple, he replied: "Why should such a man as I flee? . . . I will not go in." (*Neh.* 6:1-11)

This reply shows Nehemiah to be a man who was not afraid, who had nothing to hide and would not skulk about. His purposes were open and sincere; and for this reason as well as because he was such a masterful leader of the workers, the wall was finished in fifty-two days. A great piece of work was thus accomplished; but even more important than the work was the spirit in which it was done. Again people's hopes arose. Sometimes hope means more to the upbuilding of a state than walls.

At the dedication of the walls there was great rejoicing as singers from the temple and from the region round Jerusalem marched on the walls chanting psalms of thanksgiving. Perhaps the first *Book of Psalms* was collected for use at this time. Also it is probable that parts of the *Book of the Law* were read at this time for Nehemiah was anxious when he went back to his Persian king to leave a purified community. He it was who began collecting the library of the Jews which afterwards became our Bible. Some of the sacred books were still in Babylon and some of these priceless rolls individuals had brought back with them for the temple.

Another thing Nehemiah did was to make a rule that no one could marry outside the Jerusalem com-

munity. Those who had done so must put away their wives. Everybody was ordered to be more careful about keeping the Sabbath also. Thus Nehemiah tried to build up the wall of the law to keep Judah pure; then he traveled back to report to his king.

Nehemiah was thus the reconstructor of Judah not only physically but spiritually. He left a Judah full of joy and determination to prepare for still greater days ahead.

CHAPTER XXXI

ATTEMPTS TO GAIN NEW FREEDOM

Literature gives voice to the soul of a people. The Hebrews learned by their experiences, especially during the exile, to express themselves in various forms of literature. We find, therefore, that their people often express their protests against wrongs in song or story. A good story is often more powerful in righting a wrong than a law. A story protesting against a law is the little book of *Ruth*, which is really one of the earliest known novels. It puts itself far back in the time of the Judges, just as novel writers today often like to make believe they are writing in an early time. But the purpose of the writer is to correct some of the bad effects following from Nehemiah's laws. In order to be holy must Hebrew people never marry people of other races? So Nehemiah's law had decreed. But the writer of *Ruth* says, No, love is greater than law, as I will show you by the story of Ruth the Moabitess whose love for her husband's mother brought her to Bethlehem, where she became the wife of a Hebrew and an ideal mother and worshiper of Yahweh. (Read the book of *Ruth* if the story is not entirely familiar.) The author probably knew cases where families had been cruelly

separated by rigid adherence to law (see *Deut.* 23: 3, and *Nehemiah* 13: 23 f), when the real spirit of the law—to make a holy people—would have been better fulfilled by allowing the people who loved each other and Yahweh, to remain together. The book of *Ruth* is, then, an attempt to gain true freedom in connection with the law.

You all know the story of Jonah and the whale. This is another story written by some one who wanted to ask for more kindness to aliens. It is not the fish that is the center of this story but the heathen. The author did not mean us to think so much about the fish as about the thousands of people outside of Israel who would be destroyed if no prophet would go to them. The last words of the book give us the purpose of the author:

Shall I not have pity on Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand, and also much cattle? (*Jonah* 4:11)

Why was Jonah “very angry” when Yahweh refused to destroy the city of Nineveh, that is, people outside Israel? Because he was a narrow patriot who had his eyes on his own country only and would not remember that aliens are also people. The author pictures the sailors in the boat as sorry to cast Jonah into the sea. They were kind men who “rowed hard” to bring the boat to land and only at the request of Jonah did they finally throw

him overboard. Then they made vows to Yahweh. They were not bad men though they were aliens. (Read *Jonah* 1:4-17)

This story shows, then, that the Hebrews in their reconstructed city were growing narrow and forgetting the ideas of their mission to the world. Had they not, in captivity, learned that they were to become a "light to the Gentiles"?

But events far away again changed everything for the little commonwealth and compelled them to think about the Gentiles. Greece arose and disputed the right of the Persians to control, and out of their war there came forth Alexander the Great who became the ruler of the whole civilized world. An old story says that when he came to Jerusalem, the high-priest put on his beautiful robes and went out to welcome the great conqueror. The people knew that they could not stand in the way of Alexander, so they welcomed him and soon found themselves surrounded with Greek civilization. This meant that Greek temples and gymnasia were built in the towns and that Greek traders came everywhere with their wares. All this mixing of ideas and customs was good for both Jews and Gentiles, and all went well until some years after Alexander's death. Then a narrow-minded ruler began to deprive the Jews of their liberty and to demand that everything Hebrew should be thrown away. It is strange that people of different religions and races do not learn that they can help each other and live happily together only if they will give each other

freedom. It was a man named Antiochus Epiphanes who put the kingdom of Judah under the iron rule of oppression because he wanted to make it Greek. His agents robbed and killed the people.

They shed innocent blood on every side of the sanctuary, and defiled the sanctuary. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem fled because of them. . . . Her feasts were turned into mourning, her sabbaths into reproach, her honor into contempt. (*I Mac.* 1: 37-39.)

All over the land were placed Greek altars and all Jews were ordered to sacrifice to Zeus and other Greek gods. Think what this meant to Jews who from childhood had been trained to be true to Yahweh only and to study and keep the sacred law. Think of the terrible choice that many a young man had to make—to eat unclean meat offered to idols or to die.

And many in Israel were fully resolved and confirmed in themselves not to eat unclean things. And they chose to die that they might not be defiled with the meats, and that they might not profane the holy covenant: and they died. (*I Mac.* 1: 62, 63.)

A wave of horror passed through Israel when Antiochus set up an altar to Zeus in the temple and offered swine upon it. This was henceforth referred to as the "abomination of desolation." (*I Mac.* 1:54, *Dan.* 11:31)

Such measures were gradually driving the people to desperation. Would Israel give up her holy

books just because it was cause for death to be found with one? No, the Hebrews were of stronger stuff than that; at last they revolted.

It was in a little village of Modin that the Greek officers ordered Mattathias, the father of five sons, to sacrifice to the gods.

And Mattathias answered and said with a loud voice, If all the nations that are in the house of the king's dominion hearken unto him, yet will I and my sons and my brethren walk in the covenant of our fathers. (*I Mac.* 2:19, 20)

Then a Jew was seen coming forward to sacrifice and this filled Mattathias with such wrath that he killed the Jew and the king's officer and pulled down the altar and shouted,

Whosoever is jealous for the law, and maintaineth the covenant, let him come forth after me. And he and his friends fled into the mountains, and forsook all that they had in the city. (*I Mac.* 2:27, 28)

To the leader in the wilderness flocked hundreds of devout souls who were willing to face dangers for the sake of remaining true to the law. They must have had to sleep in caves and such places as they could find amongst the rocks, and food must have been scarce. But when men care greatly for doing the right they endure hardships gladly. Mattathias and his friends went forth into the towns and pulled down the Greek altars and everywhere gave courage to the Hebrews. When the old father, Mattathias, died, his son Judas became leader and because he

was "strong and mighty" he was called Maccabeus, which means hammer.

Antiochus was so furiously angry that these Jews should dare to disregard his commands that he gathered his army together to crush them. When Judas and his little company saw the army coming they said,

What? Shall we be able, being a small company, to fight against so great and strong a multitude? and we for our part are faint, having tasted no food this day. But Judas said, They come upon us in the fulness of insolence and lawlessness to destroy us and our wives and our children, to spoil us: let us fight for our lives and our laws. Be ye not afraid of them. (*I Mac.* 3: 17-22)

Then they leapt suddenly upon their enemies and drove them away defeated. This happened again and again until, to the astonishment of every one, Judas finally entered Jerusalem, purged it of foreign soldiers and became the head of a new and independent Jewish kingdom. This is one of the notable cases in history where the few who were right have put to rout the many who were wrong. The temple was at once purified and a new altar built to take the place of the one on which the "abomination of desolation" had been offered. Imagine with what joy and devotion the people found themselves again in their holy temple! A great feast of rejoicing was held and all the centuries since that year—165 B. C.—the Jewish people have celebrated that feast. (*I Mac.* 4: 41-61) Judas

is one of the great warrior heroes, not only of Israel, but of the world. He won victories for a great cause and never was untrue to that cause. For nine years he ruled in Israel, most of the time with his sword in his hand, and he finally fell in battle.

Terrible persecution returned after the death of Judas. The brothers of Judas ruled, but they were not as strong or as fine in their purpose as Judas and the people were again robbed and killed by successors to Antiochus, who had died. About the time of the victory of Judas a book was written to encourage people to be true in spite of persecution, the book of *Daniel*. The story of Daniel in the lion's den was meant to teach young people to do right and expect God to care for them. Another part of the book pictures the great powers that have surrounded and ruled Judah as great beasts. Look at Chapter 7 of Daniel; here each beast stands for the following powers:

Four beasts come up from the sea diverse one from another.

1. The first was like a lion—Babylon.
2. Another beast like to a bear—Media.
3. Lo, another like a leopard—Persia.
4. A fourth beast, terrible and powerful—Greece.
5. The little horn—Antiochus.

(See *Daniel* 7: 4-8)

Is this not a strange way to write history? It was the way that had to be taken in times of persecution when anything written against the government would be punished.

Finally, one of the Maccabaeen brothers came to the head of the nation who was stronger than the others, Simon, who was made high-priest and king. Under him the little kingdom enjoyed full independence of outside powers for a brief period. The Jewish historian remembers this period as one of peace and joy.

They tilled their land in peace, and the land gave her increase, and the trees of the plains their fruit. The ancient men sat in the streets, they communed all of them together of good things, and the young men put on glorious and warlike apparel. And there ceased in the land any that fought against them: and he (Simon) strengthened all those of his people who were brought low: the law he searched out, and every lawless and wicked person he took away. (*I Mac.* 14:8-14)

The attempts for freedom resulted, then, in a revival of a Jewish kingdom almost beyond the dreams of the most hopeful. Never could the happiness of this period be forgotten; never could the faith of true Jews fail, remembering how marvelously victory had come to the Maccabaeen brothers. Henceforth faith and hope lived in many breasts however dark might be their surroundings.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE GROWTH OF AN IMPERISHABLE HOPE

Hope is an important factor in the building of a nation. Men will endure any hardships for a cause if sustained by hope of success in the end. Probably the successes of the Maccabaeans were largely due to the faith and hope kept alive by the books that were being written in Judah. Indeed, there came to be a special class of books devoted to keeping alive Judah's courage. These have been called "apocalyptic books." This name comes from the Greek word which means to uncover, and was applied to these books because they always sought to uncover the future of the world and show how success would finally come.

One such book was written just before the Maccabaeans struck for liberty. It is called the *Book of Enoch*, for the authors (it is certain that there were several) would not have dared to use their own names lest Antiochus, the terrible persecutor, should put them to death. Enoch seemed a good name to use because he is mentioned in the old Hebrew records as a man worthy of receiving the secrets of God: "Enoch walked with God: and he was not, for God took him." (*Gen. 5: 24*) The book speaks

of Enoch as taken about by an angel and shown the secrets of the future. These writers picture a dark time of tribulation which they themselves are enduring, to be followed by the overthrow of the wicked and the coming of a happy day. It was the glowing pictures of this happy age that kept the hope of the people alive in the dark times. Listen to one of the pictures of joy to come:

And in those days will the mountains leap like rams and the hills will skip like lambs satisfied with milk, and they will all become angels in heaven. Their faces will be lighted up with joy because in those days the Elect One has appeared, and the earth will rejoice, and the righteous will dwell upon it, and the elect will go to and fro upon it. . . . And I asked the angel who went with me, saying, What things are these which I have seen in secret? And he said unto me, All these things which thou hast seen serve the dominion of His Anointed (Messiah) that he may be potent and mighty on the earth. (*Enoch* 51: 4; 52: 4) ¹

Not only is there a looking forward to a future happy time but to a future perfect ruler,—the Elect One, the Messiah,—that is, The Anointed One. The hope for an ideal king comes from Isaiah's dreams and has gradually grown stronger and more definite since his day. Another name given to the king, in these later times, was 'Son of Man. The following passage shows him with God, the Head of Days:

¹ See *The Book of Enoch* by R. H. Charles.

And there I saw One who had a head of days, and his head was white like wool, and with him was another being whose countenance had the appearance of a man and his face was full of graciousness, like one of the holy angels. And I asked the angel who went with me and showed me all the hidden things, concerning the Son of Man, who he was, and whence he was, and why he went with the Head of Days? And he answered and said unto me, This is the Son of Man who hath righteousness. And this Son of Man whom thou hast seen will arouse the kings and the mighty ones from their couches and the strong from their thrones. (*Enoch* 46:1-4)

A question that arose in dark days of persecution was this: Will those who have been killed by wicked rulers have their part in the glorious age of the Messiah, the Son of Man? The writer of Daniel was the first to try to answer this by saying that the dead should some day come to life:

Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. (*Dan.* 12:2)

The Enoch writers also spoke thus:

In those days the earth will also give back those who are treasured up within it. (*Enoch* 51:1)

After the dead had come to life there was to be a Judgment Day in which the records of the lives of all people would be judged. Then the righteous would be made happy either on the earth or in the

heavens and the wicked given terrible punishments. One passage says they are to be cast into fire:

I looked and turned to another part of the earth and saw a deep valley with burning fire. And they brought the kings and the mighty and put them into this deep valley. (*Enoch* 54:1, 2)

Not only wicked people are to be tormented with fire but it was believed that there were many demons who would be bound with "iron chains of immeasurable weight" and cast into a dark abyss. (*Enoch* 54:3, 4)

An idea that we find throughout these books is that the world is full of spirits who take charge of all things. For instance, there is a spirit of the sea who holds it back and drives it forth as though it were a horse. There is a spirit which keeps the thunder and lightning in their proper places:

For when the lightning lightens, the thunder utters its voice, and the spirit enforces a pause during the peal, and divides equally between them; for the treasury of their peals is inexhaustible, and each one as it peals is held in with a bridle, and turned back by the power of the spirit. (*Enoch* 60:15)

Does it seem strange that the Hebrews should come to believe in spirits and demons? They are somewhat like the fairies and goblins of our fairy books. We remember, too, that long ago, in the desert, the Hebrews had thought that there were gods for every tree and spring. But the belief in angels and spirits is different, for they now know

there is but one God and they are trying to find out how he does all the work in his world. They are no longer children but are beginning to be scientific. When they try to explain how it is that there is a pause between the lightning and the thunder they are trying to solve the problem that it has taken many years to answer. We now say that the lightning cuts the air asunder and that it takes some time for the sound of its coming together again to reach us. But there is probably much about the explanation that we do not yet know. Each age looks back on the explanations of the previous age with amusement. And there is certainly much that we do not know about the other problems the Hebrews were trying to solve. How is it that some of the wicked do not seem to be punished here? Will they be punished after death? But it is a fine thing to keep asking questions about all things we do not know. Only questioners can grow to know the truth!

We cannot help being sorry to see among these Jews a growing desire to see the wicked punished so cruelly. It is one thing to feel that wickedness should receive the just punishment naturally flowing out of it and another thing to rejoice in seeing the wicked suffer. The growth of the idea of a hell with everlasting fire and terrible torments was not one of the noblest things of this period. We shall have to say the same of a certain bitter hatred for Gentiles. It is not strange that people should hate their oppressors, but hatred is always degrading.

One interesting book of this period which is

spoiled by its expression of hatred of the Gentiles is the book of *Esther*. The beautiful thing in this familiar story is that Esther is willing to risk her life to save her people; the ugly part of the story is that Esther used her triumph to secure a decree for the Jews to massacre their enemies. (*Esther* 9: 15-18) It was not strange that a nation that had grown up through such hard experiences of exile and oppression should develop both good and bad qualities. But the marvelous thing is that the Jews developed so much that is good. The bad, the narrowness and hatred, the world needs to outgrow; but the hope in a better age to come, and the willingness to sacrifice everything for that age of justice, is something the world needs and values today.

During the Maccabean age people hoped that the glorious era was almost here, but they grew more and more disappointed as they saw their ruling family quarreling among themselves. Finally this resulted in the inviting in of another great power which soon became their master. This was Rome, which had overthrown the Greek kingdoms and organized them all into the Roman Empire. It was Pompey, the great Roman general, who gladly took the chance offered him by the quarrels of the Maccabaeans to gain control of Judea. For three months he besieged the temple and finally took it on a sacred feast day, and killed the priests at the altar. He carried off Aristobulus, the young Maccabean ruler, to march as a captive in his triumphal procession in Rome. Again the hearts of the Hebrews

sank in despair, for once more they found themselves in the grip of a foreign power. After nearly a hundred years of independence it was more bitter than ever to find the strong hand of a foreigner making laws for them. But the marvelous thing about the Hebrews is that no persecution overcomes them; always hope springs up anew.

So we find the Roman period to be the age in which the hope of the Messiah and the golden age shines strongest. A new party of the Pharisees had grown up who said that if the people would but keep the law perfectly, the new age would soon dawn. These Pharisees were, at first, enthusiastic young men who separated themselves (the name Pharisee comes from a verb meaning to separate) from those who were careless about the law. These zealous young men wrote the *Psalms of Solomon*, sometimes called the *Psalms of the Pharisees* just after the death of Pompey, who had again desecrated the temple. They rejoiced that an evil power was overthrown and prayed for the quick coming of the King Messiah:

Behold, O Lord, and raise up unto them their king, the
son of David,
He shall glorify the Lord in a place to be seen of the whole
earth,
And he shall purge Jerusalem and make it holy, even as
it was in the days of old,
A righteous king and taught of God is he that reigneth
over them;
And there shall be no iniquity in his days in their midst,

for all shall be holy and their king is the Lord Messiah.

• •

*Psalms of the Pharisees*¹ Ode 17.

Thus we can see how the Hebrews have attained to an imperishable hope which exile, persecution, and apparent failure cannot take away from them. This hope can hold them together and sustain them when all the world is against them.

¹ See Ryle and James' *Psalms of the Pharisees*.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE HEBREWS GIVE THEIR IDEALS TO THE WORLD

Had it not been for their power of looking to the future the Hebrew people would have felt discouraged as they not only found themselves under the rule of the Romans, but that even their everyday affairs were controlled by some Arabians. It was the last weak members of the Maccabaeen house who sold themselves to a wily Idumean, named Antipater, because he could help them get money. But what he cared about was power to make his sons rulers of Palestine and this power he acquired. The most interesting and best known of these sons was Herod. The story of this son is one of the most dramatic in all history.

We first meet Herod as a fifteen-year old boy appointed ruler of Galilee by his father. One of the first things he did was to go to the rocky hills of Galilee and hunt out "robbers." Josephus, the Jewish historian says,

"As he was a youth of great mind, he presently met with an opportunity of signalizing his courage; for finding there was one Hezekiah, a captain of a band of robbers, who overran the neighboring parts of Syria with a great troop of them, he seized

him and slew him, as well as a great number of the other robbers that were with him.”¹

Now there is something strange about these “robbers,” for it pleased the Romans to have them killed, but it did not please the Jews who had kept to themselves the right to pronounce the death sentence. The wives and mothers of these men who were killed went to the chief men in Jerusalem and begged that Herod be tried for this deed and they promised to punish him. This makes it probable that these men who had been living out in the wilderness were not robbers at all, but some of the Hebrew people who could not bear to see their country degraded by these outsiders. Perhaps they hoped to drive them out as Judas Maccabaeus had done; at any rate they preferred to live in the desert till better times appeared.

The Jerusalem Council, called the Sanhedrin, tried Herod for the murder of the robber, Hezekiah. But he appeared before them clothed in purple, surrounded by armed men, and the Sanhedrin did not dare condemn him, especially as the Romans ordered them to acquit him. One is not surprised, then, to learn that the bold young man Herod determined to be king of the Jews in Palestine, no matter how much he was hated. When feeling was so strong against him that he had to flee, he started for Rome, to find Mark Antony. When he could find no boat, he built one, and after overcoming many difficulties he at last found himself face to face with Antony,

¹ See *Josephus*, Autobiography, 14:19.

who was so impressed by his power and resourcefulness that he gladly made him king. But how was this king to win his kingdom? He secured some Roman soldiers and started back to fight his way to his throne. He tried to enter Galilee but the Galileans whom he had fought before were too strong for him now and shut him out of his kingdom.

There was a beautiful girl named Mariamne, a descendant of the Maccabean brothers. Herod knew it would make more Jews willing to receive him if he married her. It was this marriage and Herod's unconquerable determination that finally won Palestine. Once within the walls of Jerusalem, he took possession of everything with a strong hand. Indeed, the love of power which had given him success soon began to be his undoing. So jealous was he of those about him who might rise to any popularity that he found ways of putting them to death. Gradually, most of his own household were put out of the way, and finally the jealous court women cast suspicion upon Mariamne. She seems to have been a truly beautiful character and Herod deeply loved her. That love might have raised his life to nobility but Herod, in a moment of rage at false reports, ordered her executed. Then he nearly went mad as he realized what he had done. The rest of his life was one of remorse and of degrading attempts to increase his power. The important thing that he did for Jerusalem was to rebuild and beautify it; Greek architecture appeared everywhere, and great fortifications. So massively did he construct things

that they stood for the centuries. Part of the army barracks which the British took from the Turks in the war of 1914-1916 was a fortification built by Herod the Great.

An important work that Herod did for the Jewish people was the rebuilding of the temple. They forced him to keep the Holy of Holies just as it was in the old temple but he enlarged and beautified the outer portions. By adding a great courtyard surrounded by cloisters he gave opportunity for a university, and teachers soon gathered here with their pupils about them. The story of Herod's life shows that he had no understanding of the things that were of deepest interest to the Hebrews but he did not hinder them so long as they did not talk revolt. Thus it came about that Jerusalem became the center for the study of the Hebrew literature. Famous teachers expounded the Jewish law in the temple cloisters. Two famous teachers were Hillel and Shammai. The difference in their explanations of the law is shown in the following story:

A stranger once "came to Shammai to be converted provided that he could be taught the whole Torah while he stood on one foot. Shammai beat him away. Then he went to Hillel, who said, What is hateful to thyself do not to thy fellow; this is the whole Torah, (Hebrew word for law) and the rest is commentary; go, study."¹

Shammai beat the questioner because he believed in keeping the letter of the law without asking any

¹ *Sayings of the Jewish Fathers*, p. 23, note 33. Taylor.

questions, while Hillel tried to see the great principles underneath the details. These teachers were Pharisees; and one sad thing about the Pharisees was that many of them did not see the real meaning of the Law. They thought it was more wicked to lift up a "burden" on the Sabbath than to take away a widow's house, if they could manage to do it without breaking the letter of the law.

Opposed to the Pharisees were the Sadducees who stood by Herod and the Romans and were, therefore, wealthy and powerful. In both parties there were scribes who copied and explained the law but most scribes were Pharisees because it was the Pharisees who kept the Hebrew ideals alive and so cared most to read and copy the books. They read to the people the passages about the coming of the Messiah in the *Psalms of Solomon*, also called the *Psalms of the Pharisees*, and in the apocalyptic books. They could never be content to consider the ambitious, cruel Herod as the rightful ruler of their holy land. They pointed always to the future when the ideal ruler and teacher of the Jews should appear.

No doubt many of the people who had gone out into the desert, to get away from the Herods and from the Romans were also people who were praying and hoping daily for the coming of the true kingdom. Imagine, then, the excitement when, a few years after the old Herod had died and left his kingdom to his sons, word went out that a man of the desert was "preaching in the wilderness of Judea," saying,

"Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

As a sign that it was necessary to be clean in heart in order to have a part in the kingdom he dipped them into water and called it a "baptism of repentance." He, too, pointed to a coming Messiah who should not baptize in water but "in the Holy Spirit." (*Mk.* 1:1-7. *Matt.* 3:1-2)

One young man who heard of this wilderness preacher was Jesus, son of a carpenter in Nazareth. He was so much impressed by John the Baptist that he not only was baptized but began proclaiming the kingdom, too, and called upon people to "Believe the Good News." (*Mk.* 1:15)

One Sabbath day Jesus stood up in the synagogue in Capernaum by the Lake of Galilee and taught.

And they were astonished at his teaching. They were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What is this? A new teaching! (*Mark* 1:27)

What was so astonishing about his teaching? That question it will take at least another year of study to answer, and it would require all one's lifetime to reach an understanding of the marvelous personality of Jesus of Nazareth. In him we meet the greatest of the Hebrew prophets, the one who gathers up all the best that had been developed by the Hebrew people from the days in the desert and gives it forth in his teaching and in his life. The justice which Amos preached; the tender forgiveness of Hosea; the holiness and righteousness of Isaiah; the tragic sorrow of Jeremiah over a wicked

and stupid Jerusalem, Jesus seems to have felt himself. Moreover, he saw, as Jeremiah had, that the future of the Hebrews did not depend on their city or their land but on their ideals. Like the second Isaiah he saw that the Hebrews were to be a "Light to the Gentiles" and this could not depend upon any land or buildings but upon ideas. So he spoke constantly of God, the Father, in order that they might carry light everywhere.

But the Pharisees and Sadducees were so shut up to the letter of the law that they could not see that Jesus was carrying out its true spirit and fulfilling some of their hopes of a leader who would lead the world in ideals, not in military power. Thus they refused to listen to Jesus as a prophet of God and finally caused him to be put to death. But they could not kill his ideas nor the memory of his life. The common people had heard him gladly and their friendship with him had made new men and women of them, so that they went out everywhere and proclaimed that Jesus was the long expected Messiah, the Christ. Everywhere as they taught, people freed themselves from the bondage of the law and lived on the idea of love to all. With such ideals, these common people eventually overturned the world. The Hebrews who scattered over the world after the final destruction of Jerusalem carried some of their ideas abroad, but chiefly it was Jesus and the early Christians who completed the work of the heroic people of Israel to give the idea of God the Father to all the world.

